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No.8 MAY 1986 £1.50

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HOT REVIEWS



MAY SPECIALS

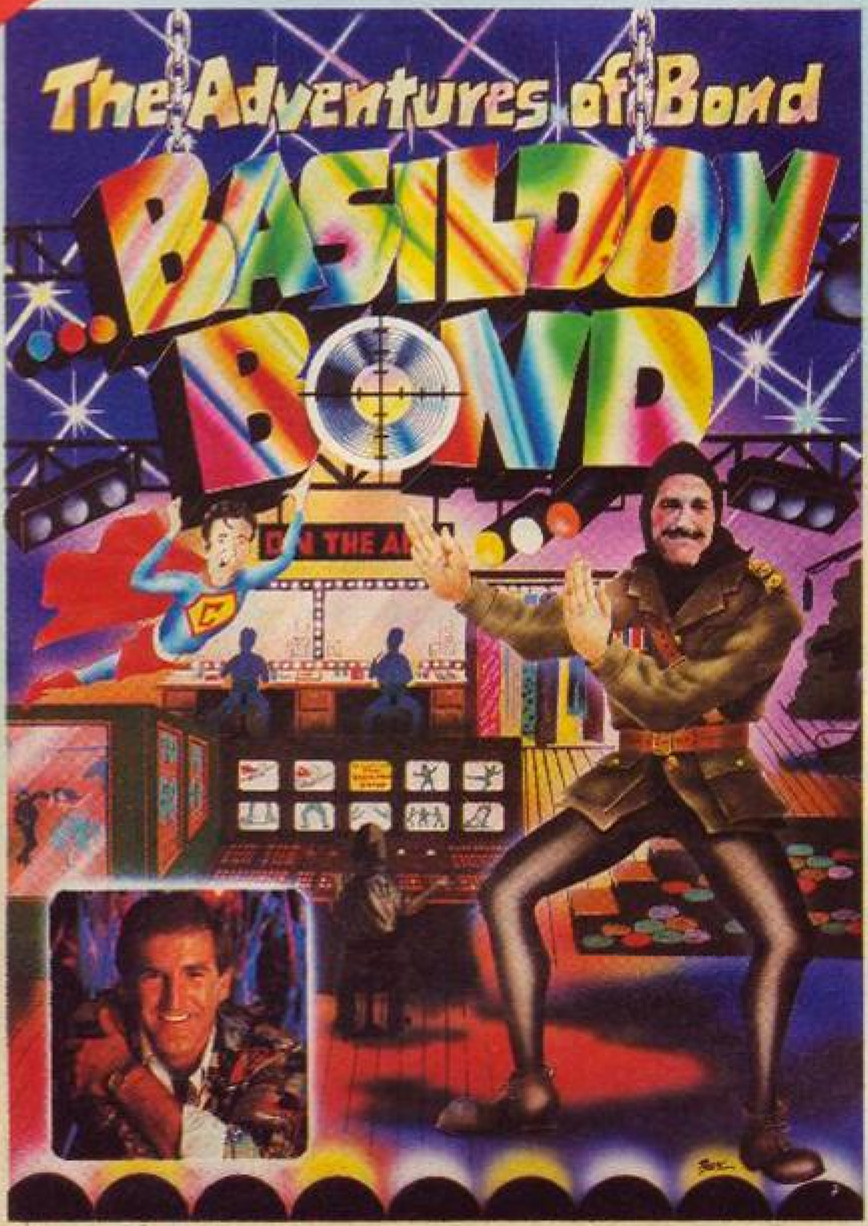
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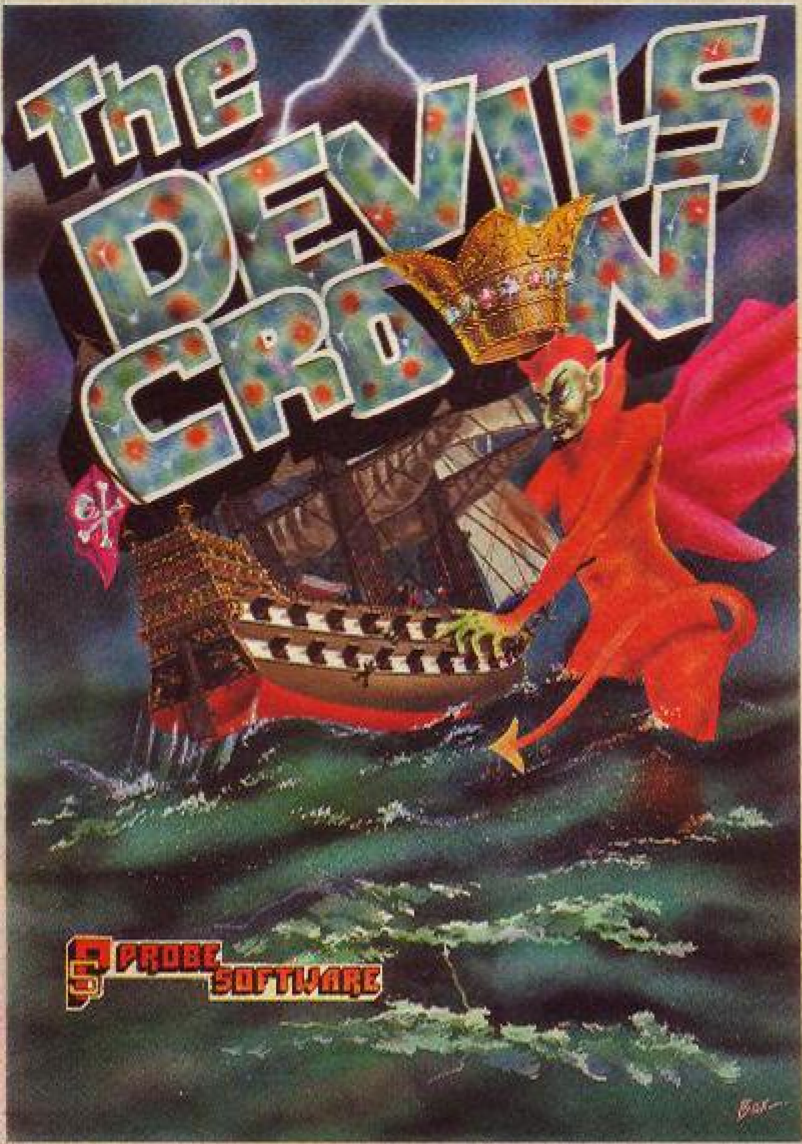
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Amstrad Action Review – A.A. Rave
Graphics 94% Sonics 75% Grab Factor 85%
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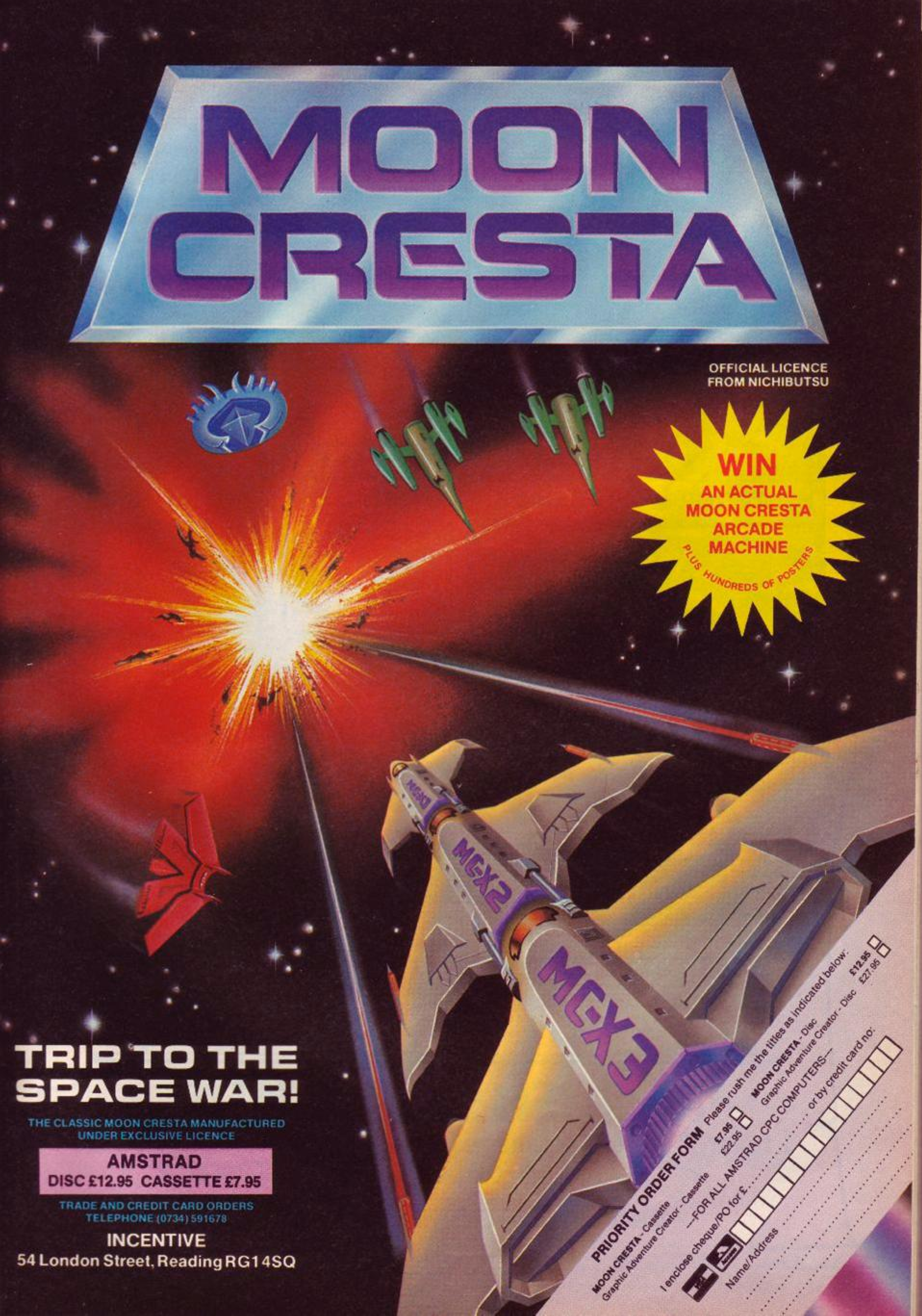
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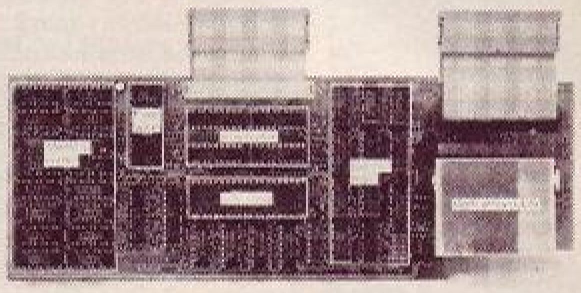

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Dear Readers,

Goodbye. That may seem an odd way to start a letter, but the thing is, you see, I'm leaving. Fresh fields and pastures new beckon me, so Amstrad Action and Pete Connor must tear themselves apart.

Well, it wasn't an easy decision to go. I've grown very attached to the mag since it began way back in September of 1985. I've left my mark all over it in the form of misprints, errors etc. But the time has come to return to civilization, after a couple of weeks drying out the cider on a health farm.

AA, though, will be left in very good hands. Publisher Chris Anderson will revert to his previous incarnation of journalist to look after the next issue. After that the mag will be edited by Matt Nicholson, formerly editor of *What HiFi* and *What Micro*. For more details of Matt, see the next page.

If you've noticed what was on the cover – and if you haven't, see an optician – then you'll realise that this has been an exciting issue to go out on. The cover cassette is a real bobby dazzler. Not just a whole free game, but demos of some of the most exciting software around – including this month's Mastergame. I think the rest of the issue matches up to the cover.

So, once again, I bid you farewell. I hope you've all had as much pleasure from reading Amstrad Action as I've had editing it. And stick with it – it's getting better all the time.

Peter Connor

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Peter Connor

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Trevor Gilham

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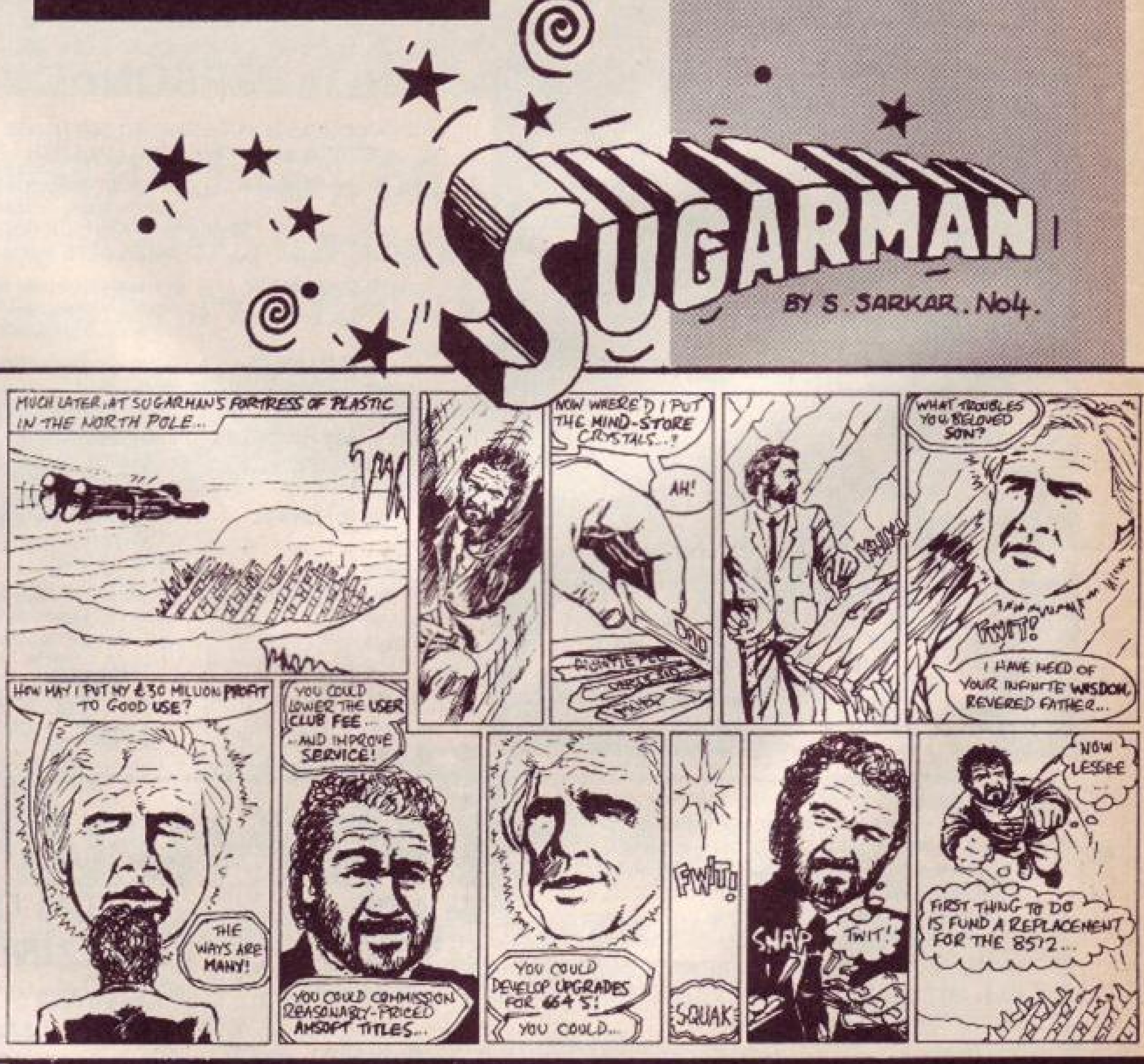
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Hi-score challenge

Now that you all have copies of The Covenant we expect to see a massive battle ensue for the title of Nationwide Covenant High Score Champion. Check out the Hi Score pages in this issue for the current champ. Go on, knock him off the top!



★★★★★★★

Incoming Ed

AA's new editor is to be Matt Nicholson, who should be joining in a couple of issues' time. Matt, 32, has lately been editor of the magazine *What Micro?*. His answer to that publication's title seems to be Amstrad – the 6128 was *What Micro's* machine of the year, 1985.

Previously, Matt was editor of *What Hi-Fi?*. I don't know what make his is, but I'm sure it's not an Amstrad – he reckons it's worth getting on for two grand.

Matt's married and has a two-year-old daughter, Jemma. He expects to live in Bristol and commute to AA GHQ by car.



Your new leader – Matt Nicholson.

ED LINES

CASSETTE LOADING NIGGLES

The duplication company responsible for the job of running off some 50,000 cassettes for this month's super-duper cover gift (one of the biggest releases EVER on the Amstrad, incidentally) has been talking to us about the problems some Arnold owners experience loading cassettes.

Apparently the tape deck built into the 464 isn't quite as solid and reliable piece of equipment as one might wish. What can happen is that the playback head (the part that moves forward when you press 'Play' to read the information on the tape) can drift fractionally out of line so that it isn't perfectly lined up with the recorded track on the tape. This shouldn't happen, but if it does it may result in the dreaded Read errors, especially on programs that are recorded at a fast speed – on our tape The Covenant is recorded at slow speed, but in order to keep the tape to a reasonable length, the four demos are recorded at the fast rate.

If you do get problems, either with our tape or others that you buy, there are two things you can do. Firstly you can clean both the tape-head itself and, more importantly, the pinch rollers that feed the tape onto it. Just use a clean cloth with a dab of methylated spirits. You will get better access to the head by pressing Play.

Secondly, if you have a small 'Philips' screwdriver you can adjust the position of the tape-head itself. Just in front of the Play button is a small hole, and when Play is pressed an adjustable screw moves into line with the hole. By turning this up to a half turn in either direction you may well succeed in bringing the tape-head more perfectly in line. Try a series of SMALL adjustments in one direction, and if that doesn't work try the other direction. If you make the adjustment when a program is running and have the volume control turned up full, you may even be able to hear the sound become louder and crisper. This process is called adjusting the 'azimuth' and it is possible to buy kits for about £10 which allow you to set it precisely to the industry standard.



Making small adjustments to the azimuth screw will not invalidate your guarantee – we find we have to do it all the time to get various programs to load. But all the same you should take care lest you actually move the head OUT of position. Don't try it unless you're confident you can adjust it back to its original position. You should also be careful to avoid pressing Stop while you have the screwdriver in position. Your local friendly dealer should be able to make the adjustment for you for a nominal charge – and if you regularly get loading problems it's probably worth having this done, rather than constantly returning tapes.

Competition winners

Entries for the competitions flooded in again last month, although the questions did seem to be a little tougher than usual. We received loads of side-splitting entries to the *Contraption* Caption Competition and whittling out fifty winners was not an easy task. Even tougher was choosing the five best entries in part two of the Who Dares Wins competition in which readers had to think up an appropriate name for a new computer language. The five who sent in the best suggestions will each get a copy of Alligata's new game *Meltdown*. The other two comps were pretty straight forward and entries for these were overwhelming, but like the others the winners will all be getting a pretty amazing prize.

RUN FOR GOLD
Andrew Coote, Halifax; D Carter, Witney, Oxon; Stuart Harvey, N. Humberside; Nicholas Fairfield, Hull; Philip Woolford, W. Yorks; Thomas Mitchell, Dundee; Michael Longman, Leicester; T Atkinson, Isle of Wight; Master M Tyson, S. Anston; Christopher Ryan, Folkestone, Kent; Mr D Hewlett, Woking; Andrew Taylor, Herthfred, E Sussex; Jane Gubb, Bristol; Gary Milner, Tyne and Wear; Lindsay Steel, Cumbria; T Forrest, Poole; N A Holland, East Huntspill, Somerset; Johnathan Humphreys, Westgate-on-Sea, Kent; Paul Barrow, Tyne and Wear; Andrew Heuze, Manchester; Ben Leadbetter, Blandford, Dorset; David Swallow, Grantham, Lincs; K Johnson, Coventry; P J Bertram, N. Ireland; George Stephen, London N15.

CONTRAPTION.
Brendan West, Bolton; Christopher Smith, Watford; Ashley Cotter-Cairns, Hemel Hempstead; Mr T Cooney, Berwick-on-Tweed; Mr L Walker, Liverpool; Toby Kayes, Camberley; Simon Roper, Stourbridge; James Ailsby, Alford, Lincs; Mark Tyson, S. Anston; Karl Whitelam, S. Humberside; David Hall, Manchester; Dean Hughes, Stoke-on-Trent; Craig Headford, Bristol; Kevin Nixon, Rotherham; Stephen Liddle, Radlett, Herts; T Forrest, Poole; Anthony Richards, Swansea; Sally Christie, Carlisle; D Ramdenee, Grays, Essex; Daryl Ward, Wigston, Leics; Paul Murphy, London N19; Mr J Henderson, Bristol; Mr Stan Fowell, Dagenham; P G Worrall, Ayr; Lee Townsend, London, N1; Mr R Oswald, Birmingham; S Harrison, Basingstoke; Robin Norman, Kings Lynn, Norfolk; R J Allibone, Worthing; Philip Wood, West Horsley; Martin Pratt, London Colney, Herts; Ralph Turner, Newport; R G Messenger, Abernethy, Perth; Nicholas Purser, Harrogate; Paul Barrow, Tyne And Wear; Mr D Hewlett, Woking; David Ratcliffe, Surbiton, Surrey; Ben Leadbetter, Blandford; Ian Thompson, Stanley, Co Durham; Michael Bird, West Bromwich; Michael Welsh, York; Nick Hughes, Louth, Lincs; A Waite, London SE23; Chad Griffin, Birmingham; Martin Appleton, Doncaster; P Thorp, Huddersfield; William Leung, Oldbury, West Mids; Mr S J Lee, Huntingdon, Cambs; Steve Doyle, Studley, Warks; Richard Conroy, Bradford.

WHO DARES WINS - PART 1
Bill Miller, Tyne and Wear; Peter Shirley, Hitchin; Johnathan Williams, Sutton; D Carter, Witney; Jason Bell, Manchester; Mr L Walker, Liverpool; Simon, W. Midlands; Hugh Urquhart, Inverness; Colin Morrison, Perth; O Cunningham, W. Lothian; Mr M J Dolderson, Chorley, Lancs; K Kosniowski, Martock, Somerset; Alex Gough, Hastings; Ben Leadbetter, Blandford, Dorset; S Wickham, Norwich; C Winstanley, Preston; John Lloyd, Horsham; K Hartland, Hereford; Gareth Walton, Bexleyheath, Kent; S Martinez, Liverpool; David Shaw, Mansfield, Notts; Mr S J Lee, Huntingdon, Cambs; Mr A Lucker, London W6; Anthony Logan, Belfast.

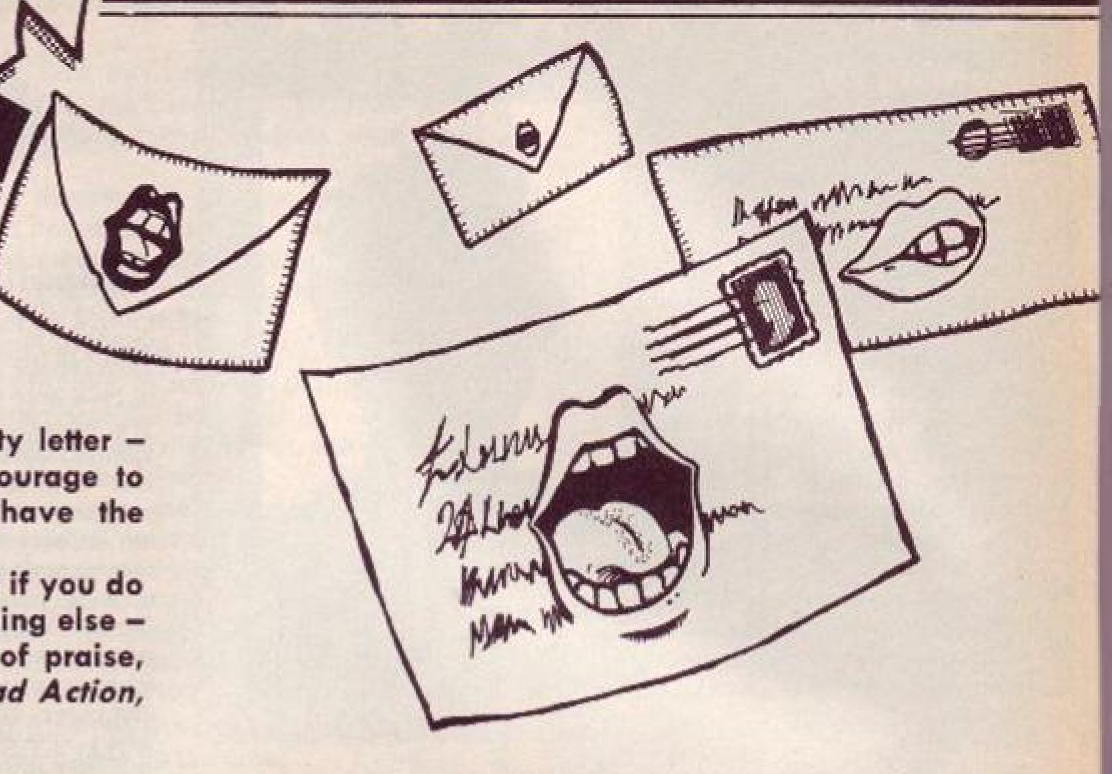
WHO DARES WINS - PART II
Anthony Logan, Belfast; K Hartland, Hereford; Ian Turner, Thornhill; David Norton, Dublin 15; Alan Gillespie, Belfast.

Hardsoft?

A very funny press release came in to the office a couple of weeks ago from a new company claiming to be called Hardsoft. It gave details of their new releases – *Seal Cull, Aids Alert, Motorway Maniac*. As you can imagine, they were all in the worst possible taste. And far too disgusting to repeat in what is, after all, a family magazine.

'Spoof', everyone shouted, especially on seeing that they were due for realease in 'the first week of April', but also included were genuine, and horrifying, screen shots of the games. If someone had gone to the trouble of actually programming something, it couldn't just mean that...could it?

Re-ACTION



This month we've got a really exciting nasty letter – see *The truth about ratings.* We had the courage to print it. Will Mark Smith of Brentwood have the courage to play the super tape he has won?

Nothing else is *too* nasty this month. But if you do want to vent your spleen – about us or anything else – this is the place to do it. Send your letters of praise, condemnation or query to: *ReAction, Amstrad Action, The Old Barn, Somerton, Somerset TA11 7PS.*

Elite backchat

I'm not knocking the mag – far from it. It's easily the best around, with excellent reviews and previews. But I, and others, just cannot agree with your *Elite* mega-tips in your April issue.

They state that you should buy a beam laser first. Now, I am not Elite but three weeks ago I was Dangerous with about 80,000 credits to my name, before sending it back to Firebird for debugging. The best thing I found to buy first was the docking computer because

a. You cannot smash your ship into the side of the space station

b. You don't have to spend half an hour looking for it!

But we all agree with the rest of the tips, especially the one which tells you to fly out of the space station, trun round, and to shoot all the vipers with a Military Laser. I use this to get up the ratings. Remember, though, whenever using this – always have a hyperspace location ready for a quick escape!

Emmet Masterson



I have been playing *Elite* from Firebird for about a month now and I have reached the status of Competent mainly due to trading in Narcotics. While I have been playing a few bugs have come to my attention. Namely:

a. The game will crash during a fight sequence, usually where there are many ships on the scanner. This is most infuriating when the game takes 10 minutes to load from cassette.

b. On a visit to Lave I spent about 15 minutes travelling in the direction of the satellite at full speed and I still didn't see it on screen.

c. When there are many ships in the vicinity for some peculiar reason the computer thinks the satellite is in range and prints the 'S'.

d. On buying an escape pod the inventory does not print it on the screen, although the computer will not allow me to buy another.

You would have thought these points would have been noticed by the programmers – it took them long enough to launch the game – and put right before they marketed the game.

Simon Holderness
Bourne, Lincs.

Emmet – Bob Wade agrees with you. But sooner or later you've got to get that laser.

Simon – what you have in (a) is the Elite mega-bug, the one everyone'sbeen complaining about. Send your cassette back to Firebird and they will replace it. Bob Wade says that the events described in (b) are perfectly possible – after all, space is a big place. (c) we're not sure about and (d) is a bug but doesn't really matter – you've got the pod, so you can use it.

Open yer ears

Recently I was getting a lot of slagging off by Commodore owners because of Amstrad's lousy sound and I knew this problem could only double once Spectrum owners upgraded to the 128K.

So after hearing so much from Amstrad about outputted sound I bought myself a jack plug to connect to a five-pin din lead and, after much playing around, I finally outputted the sound. And what a difference! Dare I say it – sometimes better than the CBM64.

M Jones
Dagenham

By all means say it – Amstrad sound through the stereo sounds fab.

Help!

Could somebody out there help me? I am a newcomer to computing and I do not understand where on earth people get all these pokes from. Would it be possible for a technical expert to write a short article about them?

Secondly, is there anybody out there who finds *Bounty Bob* tedious? Surely a facility should be provided to enter the game at a desired screen. The manner in which the game plays results in (1) losing a life every time, and (2) having to tediously retrace your steps.

What I am basically saying is, has anybody got a nice poke?

Gary Milner
Jarrow

There's no simple explanation of where pokes come from, Gary. You need to know a fair amount about programming to come up with them. As for a Bounty Bob *poke, we haven't had one yet, but if we do get one we'll certainly print it.*

?!%& games

I just thought I would write to congratulate you on your fantastic mag. But, I'm afraid, I have a few complaints.

Your software reviews seem to be getting smaller, and a lot of space is taken up by ?*!? games. I think it would be better to have a lot of good games and then just a list of bad games, like the Bottom 20. Blaby and Central Solutions are a few software houses I could mention but I won't.

Now on to the good points. The previews you had this month were excellent, especially *The Eidolon* and *Knight Games.* While I am on the subject of games, could The Pilgrim help me on *Warlord,* because sooner or later that game is going to make me crack up. How do you get past the bear at the forest or how do you get the amulet off that sily Celtic priest? He and the bear always seem to kill me.

Now on to a little word about Toot. What is he? Where did he come from? Why does he look like a pea on legs.

Keep up the good work and tell Bob Wade to keep the *?!% games limited to only a few, if any.

Simon Dean
Oakham, Rutland

Our policy at AA is to review every new game we can get our hands on. After all, you need to know about them. If we just said 'these games are naff' it would be unfair to the authors and even more unfair to the readers.

Toot's origins are shrouded in mystery, although it is possible that we may one day be able to reveal more details. Your plea for helop has been forwarded to The Pilgrim, so keep a look out on his pages.



The truth about ratings

I am writing to congratulate you on such a wonderful magazine. The reviews are so accurate, and what a brilliant idea to have only one reviewer for every game – it must save you pounds. Your covers are superb, or as the man on the A*££'%! stand at the show said: 'It looks like a five-year-old's been doodling'.

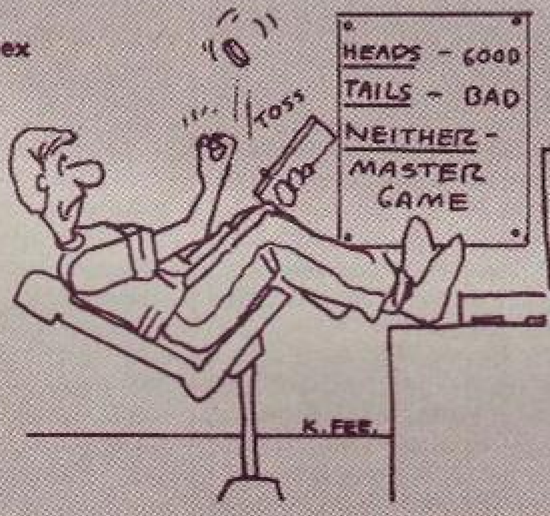
by the way, how did *Hypersports* get 88%? Or was it supposed to be 8.8%? Even the Spectrum can fit all the events in at once. How did *Beach Head* get 82%? It should have been lucky to get into double figures.

I have designed a ratings translator to help us get more from your reviews.

	How you get the number	Correct number
Graphics	Number of colours on the cassette inlay	Take away 30%
Sound	Random number between 0 and 30	Double it
Grab Factor	Depends on amount of advertising	Take away 20%
Staying Power	Depends on reviewer's mood	If *B Head* or *Hsports* take away 80%
Overall	Random no. not too far from the other ones	Buy another magazine

I know you won't print this as you only publish grovelling letters, but if I win the free tape I would like the *Graphic Adventure Creator.*

Mark Smith
Brentwood, Essex



Mark, it's your lucky issue! Yes, your trenchant analysis of AA's reviewing system has won you the tape of your dreams! Not, I'm afraid GAC – we haven't got a copy at the moment. Instead, we're going to send you one of the all-time great Arnold games – Amsoft's Bridge-It. *You lucky fellow, you. Do let us know how you rate it. We gave it 20% in Amsyclopedia, but you'll probably think it's a Mastergame.*



"TAKE A LETTER, ARNOLD"

Mini Office 2 bugs

After having read several test reports of the *Mini Office 2* program I ordered a copy early in January. Unfortunately it took Database almost a month to forward this to me but I suppose this is only to be expected in the light of the heavy demand for this product.

However, the trouble now is that many of the programs will not run correctly on my CPC 464. I have listed the problems below:

1) The Word Processor will not load at all but the words 'read error a' etc. are displayed on the screen.
2) The Spreadsheet program cannot be saved, making it totally useless.
3) The amend (edit) formula at cursor does not operate at all.
4) The delete row/column will not work.

I returned the cassette to Database Publications on the 18th February and over two weeks later received their acknowledgement that they are in fact aware that the program contains bugs. They estimate that it will take approximately two weeks to put this right, which means I will have waited nearly two months for this program.

I have to agree that *Mini Office 2* will certainly be excellent value for money when these teething troubles have been sorted out. It does seem strange though that I have not read any other letters from readers who have had similar problems.

Surely programmers should be able to iron out this sort of mistake before their products are sold on the market.

To change the subject entirely, can someone please, please tell me what I need to do to get my Centronics GLP printer to print a pound sign. All I seem to get is the # symbol.

Thanking you for an excellent magazine. Long may you reign.

RJ Varty
Billericay

The Mini Office 2 *business certainly is annoying. When we reviewed it – in our March issue – we noticed certain bugs which, we were assured, would be sorted out before release. Well, they sorted those out, but others remained.*

As for your printer, the ASCII code to print the pound sign should be one of these: 35, 96, 129. If it's one of the first two your word processor should allow you to configure a key to send the code to the printer. If it's 129 you need to send the code in the sequence 27, 62, 1, 27, 61. Word Processors such as Tasword *contain such information but printer manuals, where you'd expect to find it, tend not to.*

Durable Amstrad

Firstly I would like to reply to MK Gill's letter from your April issue. One of my brother's friends has owned a 464 since Christmas 1984 and in all this time he has not had any problems. Since anything he owns is lucky to survive more than six months I am extremely impressed with the computer's performance as I know it hasn't been treated any better than any of his other stuff.

However, his Amstrad joysticks haven't lasted quite as well, mainly due to a few games of *DT's Decathlon.* I myself have owned a 6128 since last Christmas and it still performs as well as it did the first time it was switched on, despite several months of almost constant use.

Next, have you any plans to sell binders so that regular readers, such as myself, can keep our collection neatly together?

Stephen Jones
Boston, Lincs.

The thing about breakdowns is that they shouldn't happen. You expect your computer to work, and are rightly annoyed if it doesn't. But Amstrads still seem to have a pretty good reputation.

There are no plans for binders at the moment, but if enough people express an interest I'm sure ye publisher will pull his finger out.

You also mentioned a few games you're expecting from us – they're not released yet, though by the time you read this they should be. As soon as we can get them, we'll be sending them on to you.

Moaning moanies

First, I would like to say this isn't it a letter from an Amstrad owner on an Amstrad machine and so on because my machine is known as a Schneider, but the only difference it seems to me is that awful coloured keyboard.

but perhaps there are other differences which take care of my problem. Writing on your Christmas offer, I received your mag and the two games I ordered for really fast, instead of Mr Sorensen of Denmark.

Full of enthusiasm I started to play *Bounty Bob*. Now, after four weeks playing it, fighting me through the first nine rooms (I'm not as good as your Bob Wayne). I even reached it whit three lives left, the game seems to think that this is far enough. BB – not that French girl I mean – starts running like a racing car, and after crashing my lives in to the ground, the game crashes too. So please tell me what to do about this.

I also have some problems with that vouchers. You write: 'Overseas readers can join in!' Well, let's start counting. Count down 20% of vouchers, add on 25% of popstage, also the postage of sending the money to you, the money you pay for changing guldens into pounds, and I can better buy the game over here. The games you can choose from if you sell more than £15 are oldies bu no goldies. Most of them are laying in the darkest edge of my chest covered with dust, so that doesn't help either.

So I put my hope on the competition entries. But what to think about questions like who was the last British man to win the Olympic 800m? Perhaps this is an easy question for an Englishman but I don't know. I also never heard from guys like Brian Jack, Daley Thompson, Frank Bruno, Barry McGuigan and other unknown heroes. They are more famous by their games than by their prestations.

Instead of your fast reviews of the hottest games you're a little bit – even more like Kbit – late with the review of the Vortex Ram-expansion. The first time I heard of it was in September 1985. Another German company, called Datamedia, brings also a Ram expansion. Both companies have also disk drives of 5.25".

But after these comments, your mag is still the best there is, and your reviews are a lot better than the other mags and I hope you go on with it. I specially like the sence of humour in it and your also the first mag who got me that crazy to write to them. Please forgive the bad English. I just write English letters once in five years.

And one question: would that moaning moanies moaning about the moaning moanies that moan about their 664, please stop moaning.

J Smeets
Venlo, Netherlands

Well, Mr Smeets, you have won a great victory for European readers. The publisher of AA has been forced to look again at postage costs. His look has persuaded him that it just isn't cricket to go on charging you 25% From now on the rate for mail order is 10% of the value of software ordered.

The Vortex expansions may have been around in Europe for some time, but they only reached our backward shores in January. So, we have been pretty quick on the review.



Drumkit

Help! I have tried your Amstrad *Drumkit* and lo and behold I am stuck – not for the first time I may add. I keep getting the error message 'subscript out of range' in line 360. I have rechecked line 360 and the preceding lines but I cannot see any errors.

I take your point that explaining how to debug a program would take longer than five minutes, but perhaps you could include some hints pon how to get rid of messages like the above.

J Forsyth
Ayr

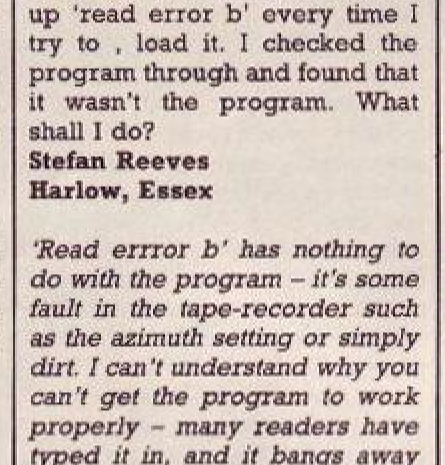
The error message you're getting usually means there is a mistake in a line containing a DIM statement. In Drumkit, there is only one such line – 220. There is no mistake as the program is printed, so you must have made a typing error.

I am writing to complain about the *Drumkit* prog printed in the March edition of your magazine.

It runs and has a screeen shot plus it plays a tune. But I find it imppossible to change the channels, make the tempo faster or slower, and to change the music. Then after deciding to write to you I tried to save it on to tape and found that comes up 'read error b' every time I try to , load it. I checked the program through and found that it wasn't the program. What shall I do?

Stefan Reeves
Harlow, Essex

'Read errror b' has nothing to do with the program – it's some fault in the tape-recorder such as the azimuth setting or simply dirt. I can't understand why you can't get the program to work properly – many readers have typed it in, and it bangs away quite nicely. Are you sure you've followed the instructions properly?



Touché, Mr Hawkins

We all need a healthy dose of scepticism to retain a balanced view of this cynical world, but Mr Hawkins' letter – March issue – is bordering on the misanthropic.

The 'grovellers' first: let's be fair – the Amstrad public spent a year with a choice of two publications, both of which endowed Arnold with about as much excitement as a microwave oven. Hardly surprising then that when AA was unleashed, the ReAction pages overflowed with praise as people dusted the cobwebs from their machines. And if a few could be thought to be gushing, with hopeful allusions to prizes, were you the epitome of moderation in your early years, Mr Hawkins? For there is no doubt that much of Action's ReAction is from the younger element (of an obviously wide cross-section of ages) of the readership. I think it safe to assume also that much of the needed vitality, to keep the Action rolling, comes from the very same people.

AS for the 'supercilious type' with the fancy equipment (!) I cannot find a single example in the ReAction pages, although I confess I don't have issue 3 to hand.

The Moaning Minnies? A little more compassion wouldn't go amiss here. We all, now,, buy many items in the sure knowledge of their planned obsolescence, but when the company chairman has been reported as having no immediate plans for a model's supersedence – and, this, surely,is the crucial point? – then only a cynicism as healthy as Mr Hawkins' may have saved the 664 owners from their unfortunate plight.

So let us live and let live Mr Hawkins – or is that a pseudonym for the man whose surmname sweetens tea?

P G Worrall
Ayr

Mr Worral, your humanity and understanding warm the very cockles of my almost-hardened heart. Let's see if Mr Hawkins cares to enter the lists once more and defend himself.



Tasword unbugged

The day has at last arrived when lil ol' greenhorn me can be of service to someone else. Even though D H Goddard in the March issue of AA appears to have superior knowledge than

I, judging by the numerous and seemingly informed moans (he himself confessed to being a right moaner) I can tell him that his *Tasword* does not have a bug.

I too experienced the problem of shift + DEL deleting the whole line instead of just the word, but I didn't bemoan my lot or blame the program. I assumed I was doing something wrong and sought advice from Tasman Software. These very helpful people listened patiently to my novice jargon and then informed me that if I removed the joystick from Ammy all would be resolved – and it was! Tasman said they didn't understand why either, but then it's the end result that matters isn't it?

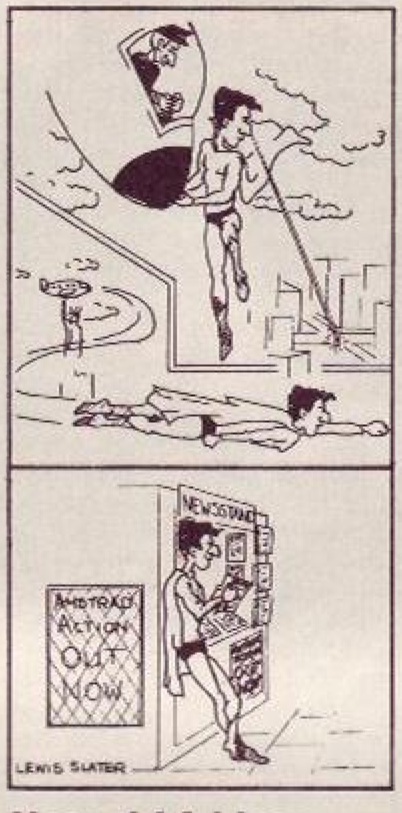
T C Weaver
Portsmouth

AMPLUG

Firstly, thanks for publishing my last letter. The response was overwhelming, so if you wrote to me and haven't yet received a reply, then bear with me. You will get one.

Secondly, it's obvious from the response I had, that there is a need for a postal club of some type, so through your magazine I should like to launch the Amstrad Postal User Group – AMPLUG. There is no joining fee, no newsletter fee, the only thing I would ask if you want a quick reply, an SAE would be appreciated. The aim of the group is to exchange info, hints, tips, programs, help, books etc. I'm also attempting to compile a central register of pen-pals, again no fees. The object is to keep a list of Amstrad users who want to correspond with others, hopefully on an international basis. If you would like to be included in the register, then I need the following info:- Name (full), age, interests, type of computer(s), address (with postcode). If you would like to add anything then please do, but that is the minimum information I would need. Finally, about my 'juvenile' moan, the largest part of my correspondence (75%) was from people under 16 years of age!!

K Clarke, 21 Clunbury Road
Wellington, Telford, TF1 3PA



More 664 blues

I would like to start by jumping to the defence of the poor 664 owners. Many people have written into your magazine to attack the 664 owners for their stupidity and foolishness on buying a 664. For example R C Hawkins of Sussex and Paul (I hope I got the name right) McGlinchey are but a couple I've seen in various magazines.

The poor 664 owners didn't expect to have their precious little Arnolds discontinued after they had paid good money on what they obviously thought was a decent disc version follow up to the 464. I did happen to own a 464 myself and I'm sure that the people who have attacked the 664 would be a little dented if the 464 was scrapped tomorrow. (But I hope not)

So I'm saying to the people who mock the 664 owners – leave them alone and treat them like proper Arnold users. Not outsiders like everyone seems to be since the arrival of the 6128.

Also I would like to congratulate you on your magazine. The content is good with plenty of good reads, tips and even a mail order service.

The charts are great but I'd like to know which charts are correct. I have two other magazines a month besides yours and all the charts say different. Can you throw some light on the matter?

I like your magazine a lot and I will continue to happily push my pound coin over the counter each month. So keep up the good work.

G Plant
Derby

User register

Kingsgraphic are compiling a *Register of Computer Users* to enable enthusiasts to make penfriends and exchange ideas, games and other software with likeminded people.

The register is updated every six months and contains, as well as the name, address and telephone number of the user, information on the type of hardware being used and whether contact can be made via a modem.

If any Amstrad Action readers would like to know how their name can be included on the register, and receive their own copy, the should send a SAE to

Kingsgraphic, 29 Seymour Close,
Chandlers Ford, Hants SO5 2JE

Microbyte Software

I am at present enjoying your great magazine. One of the best I've ever read. Keep up the good work. Now down to the real business of this letter. On page 64 of the March issue you will find an advert for a game called *Battle Stars*, from a company called 'Microbyte Software'. This advert also appeared in the Amtix! magazine in January, and so against my better judgement I sent off for the game, cassette version, at £8.95. I have since had no word from 'Microbyte Software' and frankly I'm beginning to wonder about their existence. I sent my money off to them on January 17, and it is now four weeks. The advert said fast mail order service. I have telephoned the number given several times but no one seems to want to answer the telephone. The line is supposed to be a 24 hour order line. An answer machine takes your order on weekends and Monday mornings and that is all. Please inform all your readers not to send any money off to this company or make any orders by phone because it could be months before they ever get anything from them or like me they could lose their money.

D R Harris
London, E15.



We too have been experiencing difficulty getting in touch with Microbyte. The last time we spoke was before Christmas, since when we've rung repeatedly to find out how the game is progressing.

But it's a bit early to jump to the most unpleasant conclusions – there are a number of alternative explanations. As soon as we have any news we'll pass it on. In the meantime readers would do well to hold fire on ordering the game.



Type-Ins Challenge

Right then class. Today's lesson is how to make a tenner in six easy steps:

1. Open your Amstrad Manual at Chapter 5, page 4.
2. Locate the listing.
3. Delete all the REM statements and also lines 15, 16, 17. Change all the b's, c's and a's in lines 30, 40, 60 and 90 to s, t and r – or any other three letters of the alphabet, 'cos it won't make any difference to the running of the program.
4. Change line 60 from PI/30 to PI/25.
5. In your best handwriting, copy out the 'new' program and post it to Amstrad Action.
6. Start praying that the manual in AA's office is gummed up with scrumpy and the type-ins editor has a hangover. Then sit back and wait for the postman to bring you that tenner.

A bit far-fetched? Well just look at Page 90 in Issue 6. That's just what Martin Scarland has done!

Come on AA – you didn't recognise it. I did, two seconds after it started to run, and I bet milions of other Amstrad owners did too.

So how about a 'Type-Ins Challenge', like the High-Score Challenge, to deter any more would-be crooks from nicking other people's programs and getting the credit for them. Not to mention ten quid!

Please print this letter as a warning to anyone else thinking to try the above trick. All AA readers are watching out for you!!

Steve Jones
Paignton, Devon

With readers like you who needs the KGB? Well-spotted, though. And you're right – lots of other readers noticed as well. And you're right again – we didn't notice.

So an apology is owed to Amstrad for having – albeit inadvertently – printed their program. And in case anyone else is thinking of trying a similar scam to Scarland's – be warned! Our readers are vigilant, and their revenge can be terrible!

Amstrads don't

I thought I would write to you for the benefit of those who, unlike me, are not tempted into childish gestures such as typing naughty words into the High Score list of *Sorcery Plus* during times of stress and frustration. May I say to these people – you're really missing something!

Yesterday evening I came within a hair's breadth of achieving a personal best for the game when – not unusually – I drowned. Annoyed and frustrated, I fed my feelings on to the screen – 'S£%*+! – to which the display gave me the instant reply 'What is?'

Much amused, and not a little surprised, I used my next soaking as an opportunity to lower the tone of my input further with an even less-desirable word to which the reply was 'Amstrads don't' – the kind of neat little witticism that many of the better-behaved exponents of *Sorcery Plus* may well not have experienced.

Kevin Patton
Hemel Hempstead

Whatever made you think that Amstrads did?

Conversion complaint

I have recently become the proud owner of an Amstrad CPC464, cleverly disguised as my young son's Christmas present – my wife was presented with a *fait accompli*.The reasons behind getting the machine were threefold – entertainment, education best comnputers on the market. I have not had time to delve into the business end of 'Arnold' and can speak only about the entertainment side, which brings me neatly to the point.

I have at the moment, apart from the software delivered with the machine, four games; out of those four, not one of them has surpassed itself by being adapted for 'a better computer'. The following observations are in the main concerning the graphics.

The Amstrad version of *Soul of a Robot* is downright dull and childish compared with the Spectrum version – the robot is a veritable tin man against the Spectrum's attractive droid. It gets worse when the actual man is examined – the rival version is an art form, while ours seems empty and is boringly repetitious.

Another big disappointment was *Raid*. Having seen the game on my friend's Commodore 64 I rushed out to treat myself. Where was the little man who climbs willingly into his fighter to battle the red menace? Had technology advanced so far that the hardware in the Amstrad version was 'computer controlled'. And once out of the hanger, there were no lovely Eastern European mansions and animated tanks and trucks to shoot up, only horrendously coloured boxes and two enemy vehicles, so easy to shoot up they must have a death wish.

I also found no difference whatsoever in versions of *Seas of Blood*except perhaps a smoother flow of the 'dice' in the Amstrad game. Where were all the magnificent colours I had been assured the machine was capable of, what's the point of having them if the programmers will not use them?

The fourth game was *Lords of Midnight* and with this I have no complaints, but once again there has been an effort to make an improvement by putting the game on a better machine.

Can you explain to me why the Amstrad versions of these games hardly differ at all, and in some cases are worse than the originals? Are Amstrad users at the end of the queue when games are being designed?

George Anderson
Strathclyde, Scotland

Until pretty recently, Amstrad owners were at the end of the queue. The relatively small sales of the machine compared to Spectrum and Commodore meant that games were developed on those machines first. It's hard to avoid the suspicion that some Amstrad conversions were rush jobs.

But I must say that we thought Raid and Soul of a Robot were superb. However, why don't you take a look at some of the games now appearing that are Amstrad originals? They'll give you something to write to Santa about.



So-called bargain

I thought I'd write a short letter complaining about why I'm disappointed for only the first time out of your 7 successful issues.

This morning I got my mum to write out a cheque for £4.95 for the *Alien 8* game as it was, at the time, a bargain. then later on I went to John Menzies in Bath to buy *Rambo* and saw Ultimate games clearance and *Alien 8* for only £2.99 – two pounds less than the price I'd paid you. And the cheque was already in the post! Next time I will have a hard think whether these are so-called bargains.

Brad Howarth
Bristol

Be fair, Brad – we could hardly know what price John Menzies in Bath were selling the game for. As far as we knew, the tape was terrific value. And, unless you live near Bath, I should think it still is.





A what?

I am a 15 year old amster and have been computing now for about 3 years, originally on a Spectrum. What I would now like is a fellow Amstrad User to become a pen pal. I have a 464 (tape based), a large selection of games and an open mind to new possibilities. I am not much of a programmer, but have attempted programming. My favourite games are strategy and arcade adventures. If anyone wants a pen pal it would be preferable if they lived in the region.

Paul Smith
2 Dirker Driver, Marsden
Huddersfield, W Yorkshire
HD7 6AP

Happy to be of service Paul. But what the hell is an 'amster'?

Pen Pals Club

Here's the answer to all your pen pal problems! If you are interested in having a pen pal, then send a stamped-addressed envelope to the address below. Please state type of computer, sort of games you have, sex, age, etc. If interested please write to :

The Penpals, 29 Millershank Ave., Lenzie, Scotland G66 5HP

If you write off to the pen pals, please make sure you use the postcode – we're not sure we read the handwriting correctly.

Down under

This letter is intended as an open letter to all Amstrad users worldwide informing them of the existence of the Australian Amstrad Network.

The Network is an information exchange service betrween Amstrad User Groups and has participating groups in every state of Australia. The service is free,the costs being borne by the Directors – one in each state. The criterion for entrance is the willingnes to share knowledge about the Amstrad.

We are at the moment setting up what we believe to be the first National Bulletin Board dedicated solely to thte Amstrad. From this will be produced a National Monthly Newsletter that can be downloaded by subscribers (access will be by security ROM) for which a nominal fee will be charged. Indeed, by the time you read this the system will be up and running.

Through co-operation the members already have access to information regarding RAM Expansion boards, burners, speech synths, reliability of software houses and much more.

We now have through the Network Directors personal access to over 1000 users in Australia and through this medium would like to invite any User Group, no matter what their location, to join us. Inquiries are invited from individuals who are not members of a user group.

The criteria for membership are the willingness to share knowledge and participation in conveying that knowledge to Amstrad Users.

Donald Leith, AusAmNet,
534 Albion St.,
West Brunswick, Victoria,
Australia 3055



Crazed maniacs

For one whole day I will miss using my Amstrad. The reason for this is poitics. The Unionists in N.Ireland have decided to turn the electricity to our area off. Which brings me to several points.

Why should there be political games? US Gold made a big mistake with *Raid over Moscow*. This isn't the way to ensure a good East-West relationship. *Theatre Europe* I found extremely disturbing. Surely the subject of nuclear war should not be taken so lightly. Soon, with people playing games like these we will have crazed maniacs running around!

Richard,
N. Ireland


the Perfect Addition to Your AMSTRAD Computer
MAESTRO
THIS PACKAGE CONTAINS: ONE AMPLIFIER
ONE PAIR STEREO HEAD PHONES
TWO 3" SUSPENDED POD SPEAKERS
ONE DEMONSTRATION CASSETTE

OH WHAT A G

To our knowledge, no magazine has done anything quite like this before. Thanks to a unique agreement with the innovative software house PSS, we're able to give you a cassette containing a program (The Covenant) which in the shops would cost you £9.95!

And if you've already got The Covenant you needn't feel glum because there are no less than FOUR other programs on the tape. Each is a demonstration version of a stunning new title from PSS, but the exciting thing about these demos is that you can actually play them! Better than typing in listings, eh?

LOADING THE PROGRAMS

To load the first program on either side of the tape, simply rewind the tape to the start and, if you have a disk drive connected, enter the command |**TAPE**. Then press the CTRL and small ENTER keys simultaneously and follow the onscreen instructions.

Once the program has loaded, it will run automatically. The tape will stop and will be in the right position to load the next program. (If you have a separate tape player which doesn't have motor control, you must stop the tape yourself as soon as the program runs.)

After you have finished with the first program, you can load the second program by resetting your computer and repeating the steps outlined above (except that obviously you do not this time rewind the tape).

On side B of the tape you can repeat the procedure again for the third program.

It would be a good idea to reset the tape counter at the start of each side of the tape and then make a note of the number at the start of each new program. Subsequently, by winding the tape to a point slightly BEFORE this number, you can load programs from the

THE COVENANT

This great arcade-adventure programmed by Paul Hutchinson was released by PSS last autumn and received a rave review in the November issue of Amstrad Action. Side A of our cover cassette contains the complete, unabridged version. Here are the full instructions.

SCENARIO

You are the last survivor of a pround and ancient race. Scattered about a vast subterranean complex are 64 fragments of a parchment which, when correctly assembled, will give you all the knowledge of your people's culture. Your task is to assemble the Covenant and repopulate the desolate surface of your planet with animals that live in the caverns. You do this by anaesthetising them with a stun gun. Unfortunately they don't recognise your good intentions are liable to attack you without warning!



YOUR EQUIPMENT

THE GLOBE. Controlled by telekenesis. Contact with creatures will cause an energy drain. Exit and Enter the Globe by pressing the fire button when stationary. NOTE: when outside the Globe you will consume twice as much energy.

THE STUN GUN. Only works when you have picked up the relevant anaesthetic to be found in each area. Contact with a stun bolt will cause an energy drain.

The creatures will be stunned for only a few seconds and you must get back into the Globe, manoeuvre over them and pick them up.

THE KEY. You will find a key in each area. This will unlock a chest holding a piece of the covenant but can only be used when you have collected all the creatures in the area.

THE ENERGY POINTS. To replenish your energy, find an energy point, exit the Globe and stand over it. You will hear

TRANSFERRING TO DISK

Here's how you can get The Covenant onto disk.

1. Enter the following one-line program:

```
10 MODE 0: MEMORY 4999: LOAD "ISCRN": LOAD "ICOVENANT":
|TAPE: CALL &2A87
```

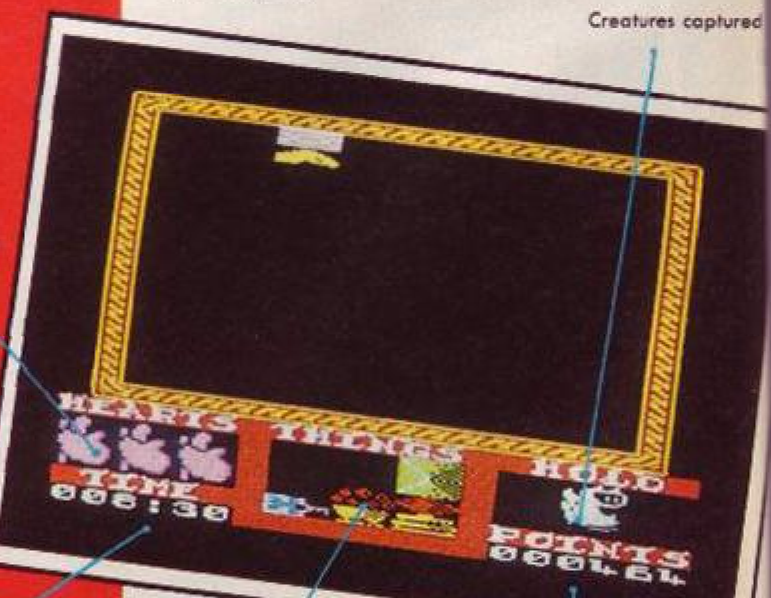
2. Save it onto a formatted disk by entering **SAVE"COV"**

3. Now type in this program:

```
10 MEMORY 4999
20 |TAPE.IN
30 |DISC.OUT
40 LOAD "ISCRN.BIN", 49152
50 LOAD "ICOVENANT.BIN", 5000
60 SAVE "ISCRN.BIN", B, 49152, 16384
70 SAVE "ICOVENANT.BIN", B, 5000, 37544
```

4. Place the cover cassette into your player ready to load at the start of side A, and make sure the same formatted disk is still in the drive. Type: **RUN <Enter>**. Let the tape play and the program will automatically be saved onto the disk.

5. Once the process is complete you can run the game from disk any time by entering:**RUN"COV**



IFT!

Special

middle of the tape very quickly.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If your copy of the tape won't load and you're satisfied that your equipment is not to blame, you may return the tape for a replacement. You should send it to the following address: **Microbyte Duplication Ltd, Unit 3, Old Coalyard Farm, Nortleach, Glos, GL54 3EP**. Make sure you enclose your name and address.

Do NOT send copies of the tape to the magazine address – we have no spare copies here!

an increasing sound that will tell you when your energy is replenished. Be careful though, some energy points actually drain your energy!

SCORING

Creatures captured: 16-24 points depending on which level.
A piece of the Covenant: 400 points.
A bonus of 3000 is awarded after collecting all the parchment and returning to the start position.

CONTROL

The opening menu allows you to choose between joystick or keyboard control. And if you are unhappy with the control keys specified you can alter them to your own preference by selecting the relevant number and then typing the control key of your choice.

In play, pressing the SPACE-BAR will show you the status screen. This shows your current energy level, the objects held, the number of pieces of the covenant collected, your score and the game time taken. It also gives you the option of SAVING the game (press S) or LOADING a game saved earlier (press J).

The FIRE-BUTTON allows you to exit or enter the Globe when it is stationary. You can also use it to fire stun-bolts provided you first pick up a piece of anaesthetic each time you enter a new section of the caverns.

Working out the rest of the game is up to you!

GET DEXTER

This is a sizzling program licensed by PSS from French company Ere Informatique. If you have any doubts as to its quality just read our Mastergame review elsewhere in this issue.

The demonstration version on our tape allows you to play in its entireity one of the game's 50 amazing screens. You may think that doesn't amount to much, but just try it. There's so much happening on this one screen you won't believe it. We reckon there are at least eight different hidden features of the game you can discover – that's in addition to admiring the beautiful graphics and enjoying the funky music.

Since much of the fun is in discovering, we won't give any more clues here. Just to say that as well as using the joystick you should investigate the effects of using the Space-bar, and the R, P and D keys.



SWORDS AND SORCERY

This is the program that is so complex it's taken PSS over 18 months to develop. It's by far the most ambitious attempt yet to simulate the Dungeons and Dragons type game on a micro, featuring impressive 3D graphics and a huge playing area.

Our demo on this tape consists of a pre-production version of the ENTIRE PROGRAM. The only catch is that every two minutes the game resets to the starting position! This means you won't be able to get anywhere near solving it. But it will give you a good idea of the program's incredible sophistication.

Swords and Sorcery is sold with a detailed set of instructions which we cannot reproduce here. However there is a mass of information on screen, and you should be able to work out a great deal of the game idea for yourself.



For a stunning special offer on these programs see page 112!

DOOMSDAY BLUES

Another cracking program from across the Channel – for full details see the review in this issue. Once again our demo allows you to try out the action for yourself by letting you explore about 10 per cent of the game's total (large) playing area. Among the things you can do are to escape from your prison cell, explore the cell block, work out how to avoid a patrolling robot, get some sleep and find a coin.

You can also admire the state-of-the-art 3D animation and enjoy the superb musical soundtrack.



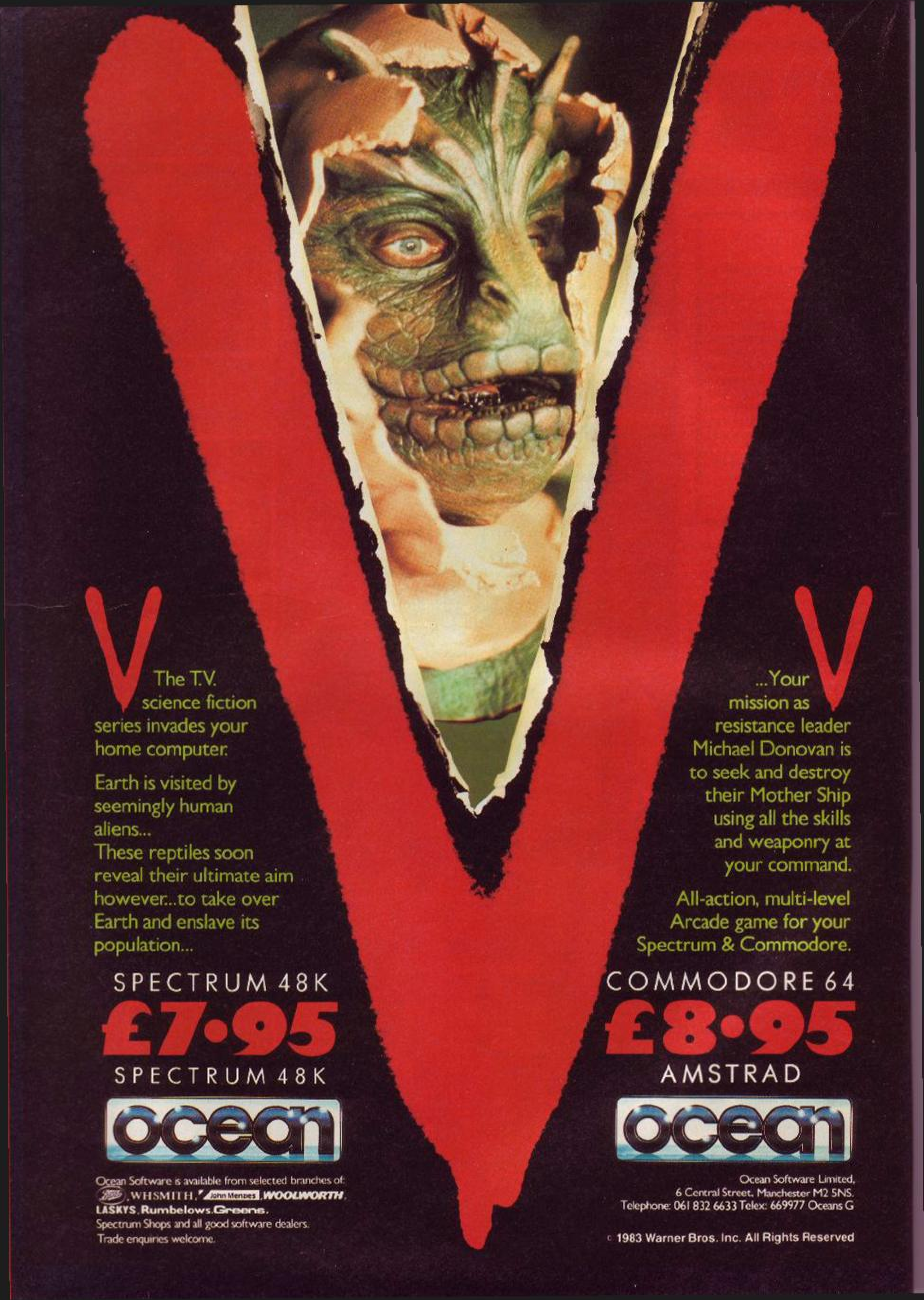
BATTLE OF BRITAIN

This war game received a Rave review in AA last December. It offers a superbly detailed simulation of the RAF's defence of this country in the 2nd World War – as one would expect from PSS who are specialists in war games.

Our demo consists of the program's arcade section intended as some light relief from the serious business of studying maps and plotting the movement of air squadrons. You have to shoot down enemy aircraft from the cockpit of your Spitfire. The aircraft first appear as a formation in the distance. You can home in on any one of them, selecting either the low altitude bombers or the high altitude fighters. Just use the joystick to get them in your sights and blast away!

In the full program your aptitude at this section influences the results of all dogfights being undergone by allied aircraft. You want to be able to shoot down around five aircraft inside two minutes before calling yourself proficient.

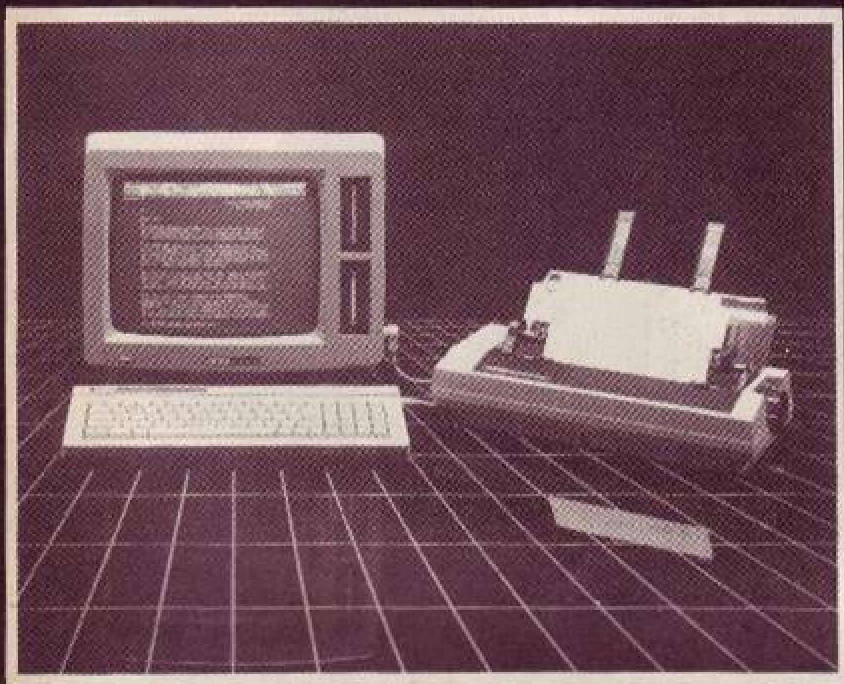



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Amscene

Starquake
Starquake is a 450 location arcade adventure from Bubble Bus. It features BLOB (Bio-Logically Operated Being) who is trying to rebuild the core of a planet to prevent it imploding and causing a starquake.

The 450 locations will apparently contain anti-gravity lifts, teleportal systems, security doors, propulsion pads and other planetary beings. The game will be available on both tape and disk for £8.95 and £12.95 respectively.



Joyce News

At last! After the weeks of rumour, anxiety and apprehension, Amstrad finally unveiled the Fat Joyce – or PCW8512. For £574 the purchaser will get a 720K formatted second drive, while the M drive – the ramdisk – has had its memory expanded to 368K.

This increase in ramdisk size means that many of the big CP/M programs will work much more effectively. It would, for instance, allow the user to run approximately 25 pages of text through a spell checker per minute.

Fat Joyce still offers the Locoscript word processing package and comes with the same printer as Slim Joyce.

New products
At the same time as Fat Joyce's arrival a host of new CP/M Plus products has been announced. **Atlast 1**, is described by manufacturers Rational Solutions as 'a radically new database' offering innovations in field types and cross-referencing. Price – £49.95.

Newsagents may be interested in the availability on the PCW of **Supernews**, which seems to do everything bar shove *The Sun* through letter-boxes. Costs £190.

Optronics' **Superwriter** software allows the PCW to drive printers other than its own. It's used in conjuction with the Centronics/RS232 interface and costs £99.99. You do, though, have to use a word processor other than Locoscript.

Firebird's Comet
Firebird's latest Hot Range game *Comet* is almost, but not quite, a licensing deal – it cashes in on Halley's comet as it whizzes back out into the depths of space. The game centres around the threat from the comet's tail that is bringing germ bags towards the Earth. Yes, germ bags.

The battle to prevent the destruction of our planet comes in three stages, each one aboard an interplanetary spacecraft. Apparently stage one is where you take off and go into suspended animation, stage two has you helping HERBIE (Human Environment Reproduction By Intelligent Electronics) keep the ship maintained and stage three has you blasting the germ bags around the planet.

We haven't seen the game yet so it's anybody's guess how that will transform into the gameplay. Firebird say you'll have to fire fast and play long into the early hours to crack it though. It will cost £7.95 (much cheaper than a Giotto satellite) on cassette to find out if you can beat it.

Your sizzling, super, soaraway, Sam
The prolific Miss Samantha Fox is about to appear in a computer game of her own. Not content with making records and taking her clothes off in the daily press she's revealing all on the computer screen in a version of strip poker produced by Martech.

Each tape will feature the gorgeous, pouting Miss Fox on one side and an international seven card stud poker game on the reverse. There will also be a disc version featuring "enhanced graphics and expanded game play", whatever that entails. The sight of Sam will cost you £8.95 on cassette and £13.95 on disk.



Sizzling Sam Fox is pictured here with, gorgeous, pouting David Martin from Martech

User groups merge
Advantage Computer User Group has merged with Amsclub to form a single user group. All Amsclub members will automatically become members of Advantage and be notified of the change. The address for correspondence for all Advantage and Amsclub members is now *33 Malyns Close, Chinnor, Oxfordshire.*

Winter wonderland
US Gold should soon be releasing *Winter Games* with six winter sport events in it. The six are bobsled, ski jump, figure skating, free style skating, hot dog aerials and the biathlon. It will cost £9.95 on cassette and £14.95 on disk and if the screen shots are anything to go by it should be very interesting indeed.



News from the North

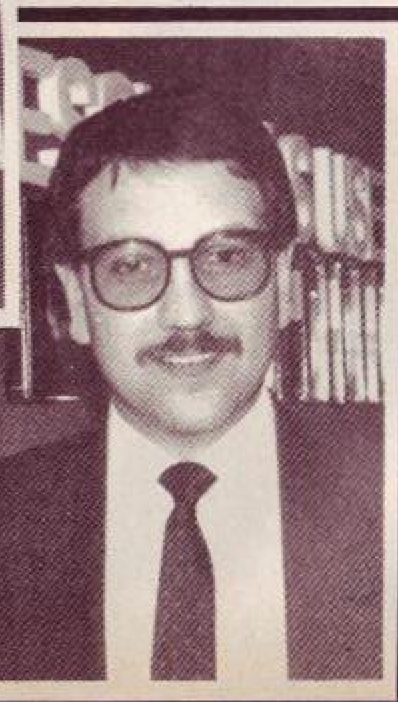
Another month, another show. Database Publications clearly find their Amstrad exhibitions to be excellent money-spinners worth putting on at an ever increasing frequency. The latest one took place in Manchester at the end of March and once again it proved that the Amstrad marketplace is simply chocabloc with new ideas and new goodies.



▶ The usual pre-10am queue forms outside.



▶ Peter Phillips showing the latest version of his light-pen.



◀ Caxton's Bob Huckle – serious software dominated the show.

Consider, for example, the *Thingi* from Overbase (Tel: 051 647 8981). All it is is a twisted bit of plastic with a sticker on one end and a clip on the other, but it allows you to dangle a document right next to your monitor screen. The £6.50 asking price might be a bit high, but it's still a good idea and it happened first on the Amstrad.

Amstrad the company were nowhere to be seen, possibly because they couldn't bear the thought of being deluged by hundreds of frenzied requests for 6128s, DMP 2000 printers and 3" disks, all of which seemed to be in very short supply. This meant that people hoping for a look at the new PCW 8512 and hints about the forthcoming IBM compatible were disappointed.

However the PCW 8256 was everywhere. Numerous companies seemed to have developed new software for it with the business brigade, naturally enough, leading the way.

players even on the much-better supported CPC machines. This is because the biggest games software producers – Ocean, US Gold, Firebird, Activision and Melbourne House – can't for some reason be bothered to attend machine-dedicated exhibitions.

Mikrogen were there, however, with an interesting demonstration of a game called *Equinox* – lovely graphics in the *Sorcery* mould, plus shooting. And Design Design were showing the eagerly-awaited *Forbidden Planet*. Oh, and Micro Power had yet another preview of *Dr Who and the Mines of Terror*, a program which appears to need a time-warp of its own if it's ever to be released.

The AMS stand attracted a lot of interest with it's preview version of AMX *Pagemaker*. This package allows you to produce and print out complete A4 layouts combining multi-column text with graphics. Versions are upcoming for both CPC and

The Missing goods

Every bit as interesting as the things on show were those that weren't. Screen Micros were supposed to have a board from Germany giving the 6128 IBM compatibilty, but no. More pro duction difficulties – indeed they are probably at least another month away. What they did have was news of another forthcoming German goody – an improved version of their upgrade for a 464 which they say will now perfectly emulate a 6128, CP/M plus andall. DK'Tronics must hate these Germans.

Evesham Micros were also whispering about an intriguing add-on which, if it materialises, could delight disk-owners.

are said to have already made a fortune from the burgeoning ranks of Amstrad-owning small businessmen, were showing their new £70 *Magic Filer* program for creating complex classification systems, while Gemini were offering a new Database called *DataGem* which claims a superfast search facility and the ability to completely change a file layout even after the data has been entered.

There were even a couple of new games on offer for the 8256 – a conversion of the popular Interceptor adventure *Heroes of Karn* and CP Software's *3D Clock Chess* (the first 8256 game with graphics and a clever pre-emption of *Cyrus 2 Chess*, which Amsoft are moving on to the Joyce).

But overall there was very little of interest for games-

I also wouldn't mind having the add-on stereo sound system being demonstrated by Vanguard Leisure. Frankly it's astonishing that there aren't more alternatives to Arnold's tinny mono speaker on offer.

There were also numerous new disk utilities being touted – *Master Disc* from Siren Software, *Disc Master* (don't confuse them) from Evesham Micros and *Disc Demon* from Beebugsoft to name but three.

As for numbers attending, I fancy it was a little less crowded than the last couple in London. It was certainly a lot less stifling hot, although naturally not enough to avoid the need for regular visits to the bar. The next one's in mid-summer and I pray they use air-conditioning.



▶ Incentive's Ian Andrew (left) with Tim Walter, programmer of Moon Cresta.



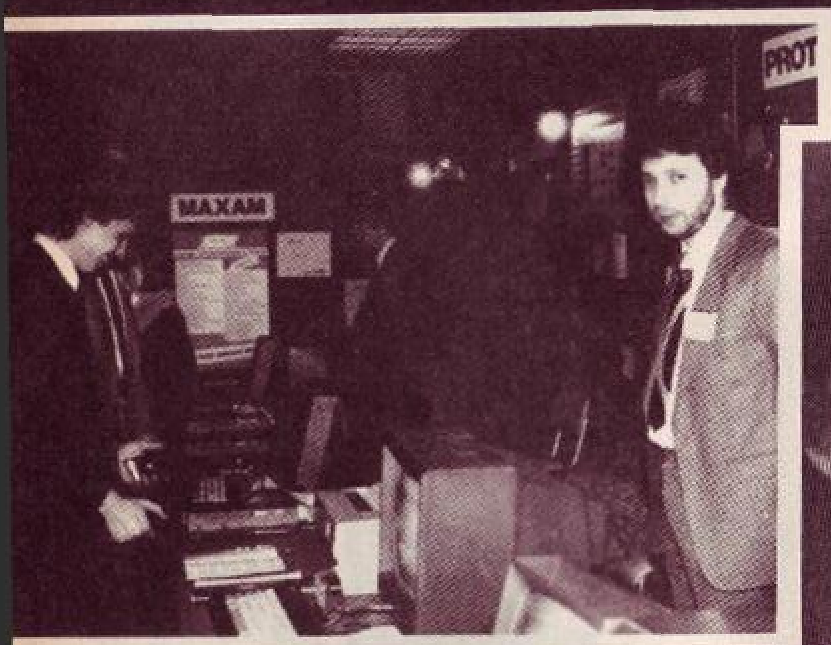
▶ Andrew Clarke toasts the success of his new book on CP/M Plus.

They claim their new widget will transfer 100% of tape programs onto disk. An incitement to piracy? Not really, because the disk versions will only run with the add-on in place.

Interceptor too were gushing about their new range of £1.99 software which 'will hit Mastertronic for six'. They didn't, however, have any to show.

Database themselves had an interesting omission from their stand , – *Mini Office 2*, a potentially superb program which was effectively withdrawn from the market soon after release because of bugs (but should be available again in cleaned up version by the time you read this).

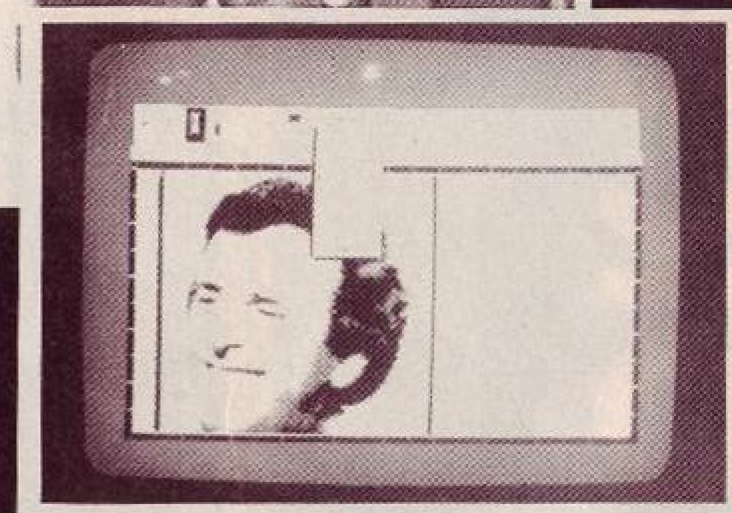
Another product nowhere to be seen was a certain unofficial user magazine. Alas, all but your reporter were too busy playing *Batman* and trying to get this issue completed to be able to manage the long trek north. Next time, next time.



▶ Arnor showing off their new Protext-compatible packages ProSpell and ProMerge.



▶ Nigel Sinclair Miller of Screen Micros – IBM board didn't quite make it.



▶ A demo of the AMX Pagemaker attracted interest – wouldn't YOU like to edit Terry Wogan's nose?

Chris Anderson reports on the Manchester Amstrad show

BOOK BLAST

Andrew Wilton puts on his half-moon specs and reviews three of Arnold's latest soft-cover releases.

STARTING BASIC FOR THE AMSTRAD, Book 1

Sean Gray and Eddy Maddix
£4.95, Glentop

The first of a two-part beginners' BASIC series, *Starting Basic* lets you in on the ground floor of programming. It spends eight pages just teaching you how to connect Arnold up and produce the characters you want from the keyboard.

The book is slow, patient and largely reader-friendly, relying on flow charts to demonstrate program structure. Now, flow charts are all very well for explaining programs in primitive BASICs, but not really the thing for handling a modern, structured dialect like Locomotive BASIC. They are symptomatic of the books's main problem – that it fails to come to terms with many of Locomotive BASIC's more important features.

For any Amstrad programming primer to completely ignore the WHILE...WEND construction is hard to justify. Continually, the example programs use conditional GOTO loops where WHILE would be much better, both in readability and style. Furthermore – and rather oddly – the book teaches assignment to variables using the obsolete keyword LET. If this formed part of some consistent policy, it would merely be a strange way to go about things. It is not, however, for within a few pages the authors start making assignments the normal, LET-less way – without any explanation of the change. If you didn't know that LET was optional to start with, this book would leave you none the wiser.

This really is very poor – after all, the whole point of buying an Amstrad primer is to be told things specifically about the Amstrad machines. As it is, the program-structuring aspects of the book look positively ancient. What with LETs, GOTOs, and :REM instead of an apostrophe, there is a certain feeling of quaintness to it.

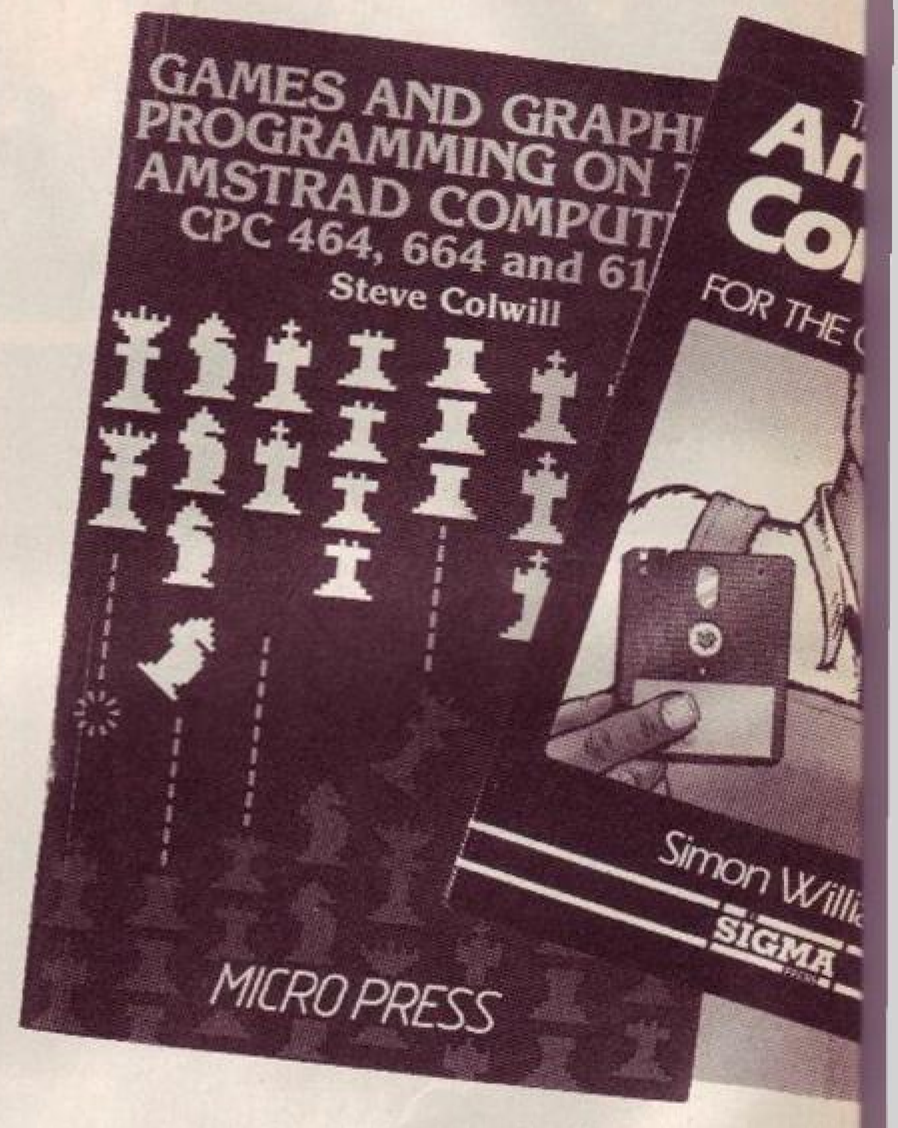
The rest of the book is, for the most part, good. The explanations are clear, and the pace shouldn't leave too many people behind. The question is, what is it going to teach you? The first few years of the micro boom produced more than enough GOTO programmers – do we really want a book like this, now that structured BASIC has arrived?

GAMES AND GRAPHICS PROGRAMMING ON THE AMSTRAD COMPUTERS CPC 464,664 & 6128

Steve Colwill
£9.95, Micro Press

Once you've read and inwardly digested *Starting Basic*, you might just about be ready for the sterner stuff of *Games and Graphics*. It's a mouthful of a title – it only just fits on the spine, in fact – but then the book itself is no featherweight.

Starting with the assumption that you already know the rudiments of BASIC, the book immediately gets to grips with structured programming and Boolean algebra. This is no lightning tour, mind you – the pace is on the brisk side, but the treatment is thorough and to the point. If you've never understood AND, OR and XOR, this book could just be what you need. It's got six pages on these alone.



Subsequent chapters are no less thorough. Inks and colours are explained about as clearly as they can be, though with some rather bafflingacronyms – LCMNs and AINs could get you confused if you're not careful. As for the essentials of character definition and animation, these too are nicely handled. At the technical end of things, a little more depth would have been welcome on topics such as frame flyback – especially given the animation bias of the book.

Interrupts are given a much-needed chapter of their own. As with all the aspects of programming handled in the book, considerable effort goes into showing how the interrupt com-

mands can be used to good effect in games programming. Whereas volume envelopes and user-defined characters are obvious at least in terms of their applications, interrupts are far more abstract. As such, they need to have their potential applications stressed above all else.

Unfortunately the subject is approached from the wrong direction here – first you have the solution, and only then the problem. This assumes a sizable amount of interest in BASIC for its own sake. You have to want to know what an interrupt *is* more than you want to know what it *does*.

If all this sounds like hard work, well – it is, in places. The clarity of explanation is certainly praiseworthy, but the subject matter can still make the going heavy. A valuable aid to understanding the book, then, is the example program *Stranded*. This is an arcade game, written entirely in BASIC, which is constructed during the course of the book. The idea is simple but effective – the theory of each chapter is put into practice at the end of that chapter, in the form of the next game section.

The main thing the book has to offer, however, is not this game or indeed the ability to write games. The truth is, even



with Arnold's powerful dialect, BASIC isn't much use as an arcade game language. The strength of the book is the learning opportunity it affords. If you work your way through this lot you'll end up with a pretty thorough understanding of BASIC as a whole – with a rather unfortunate gap when it comes to string handling, it must be admitted. You'll also be able to structure your programs, and handle trigonometry to O-level I shouldn't wonder.

A good solid book, then, with a largely practical approach. It'll take some work, though – it's not really a book for the faint-hearted.

THE AMSTRAD DISC COMPANION

Simon Williams
£7.95, Sigma Press

A bit of a mixture, this one – a mixture of the very practical and the distinctly theoretical. The practical sections form a useful addition to your reference shelf, while the theoretical parts make interesting, if rather light, reading. The question that springs to mind is, why put these together in the one book?

Topics covered range from CP/M and AMSDOS, via assembler and high-level languages, to business and similar applications. The overall impression this gives is one of shallowness – of never spending long enough on any one topic to really tell you anything.

The CP/M section is very useful, it has to be admitted. For a start,utilities such as PIP and STAT are documented much more thoroughly than in the relevant Amstrad manuals. This could certainly come in handy, since a good understanding of these is essential if you're to do anything very much with CP/M. The style of writing is conversational and quite easy to understand, again contrasting favourably with the Amstrad documentation.

The more theoretical side of the book intrudes even in the CP/M chapters, however, with sections on the use of programming utilities such as DDT, SID and MAC. While you certainly need additional information to use these – the Amstrad manuals refer you unhelpfully to Soft 159 or the unreleased Soft 971 – you might fairly ask who would want to anyway. There probably *are* people developing programs under CP/M, and using only the DR utilities to do it. The problem is, the book really doesn't contain the bulk of the information they would need. What little a machine-specific book can usefully tell you about CP/M – BIOS addresses are the only things that spring to mind – this book doesn't cover anyway.

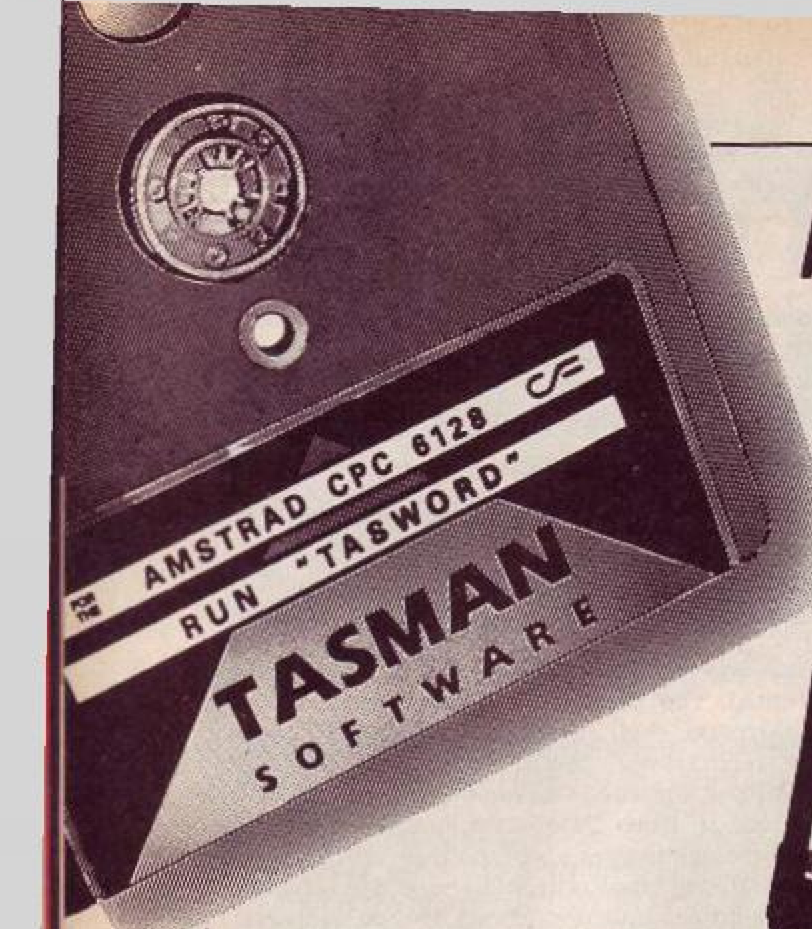
Of course, that sort of thing is way outside the scope of a general book like this. The question is not why these topics aren't covered in depth, but rather why they are covered in the first place. Much the same applies to the chapters on high-level languages and business applications.

The book rummages through three languages – Logo, Pascal and C – without covering any of them on a useful programming level. To be fair, this does serve a purpose with C and Pascal. If you were considering the move to another language, this kind of treatment could help you decide which language suits you best. As throughout the book, however, the question of direction crops up – what, I ask myself, is this doing in a disc companion?

Logo, coming bundled with the DDI-1 and both disc machines, clears this hurdle without difficulty. The question here is one of usefulness, though. At the risk of repeating myself, why cover Logo at all if you don't have space to cover it thoroughly? Nobody with an Amstrad disk system needs to decide about buying it, because they've already got it. If there's anything they *do* need, it's a proper guide to Logo programming – which this isn't.

As for the business section, much the same applies. A selection of major packages is covered, but the book doesn't really tell you anything particularly useful. If you wanted to know which database to buy, for example, you'd need comparative reviews of several different packages. As it is, only two examples of each type of program are covered – one for the 464/664, and one for the 6128. If on the other hand you have already bought one of the packages, you will probably find the book's coverage too light to be of any use whatsoever.

The book as a whole is written in a clear and helpful style – what a shame then that it is so lacking in content and sense of direction.▲



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Overseas: The following distributors of Tasman products may be contacted for the address of local suppliers. Many products are supplied in translated form. FRANCE & SWITZERLAND Semaphore Logiciels, CH 1283 La Plaine, Geneva. SCANDINAVIA Kelly data, Postboks 43, Refstad, Oslo. NETHERLANDS Filosoft, PO Box 1353, 3701 BG
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SOFTWARE?... TASMAN



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Typical Tasprint output shown at approximately half size. Please note that different makes of printer produce different sized output.

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All TASMAN 464 software is fully compatible with the 664 and 6128.

SCRATCH

Andrew Wilton surveys the vast expans

It's not easy to get excited about spreadsheets. While they are enormously useful things, they rarely involve dazzling new ideas. Now, however, Caxton have brought out *ScratchPad Plus*, a powerful program with many original features. It may not quite be exciting, but it's probably as close as you're going to get.

If you want to create a big spreadsheet, *Scratchpad* can cope. In fact, it can give you a larger spreadsheet than any other package on the market. If you want to look at several parts of the sheet at once – and you probably will – *ScratchPad* lets you. If you're after powerful, versatile functions, *ScratchPad* gives them to you.

These features are impressive, but they don't come cheap. At a penny less than £70, it's really not the sort of thing you'd buy for your domestic budgeting. That said, it is very easy to use and – price to one side – you certainly *could* do your home accounts on it. As for small businesses and the like, it should prove ideal. After all, you do get a great deal for your money.

VIRTUAL MEMORY

ScratchPad Plus is big – the main program SP.COM takes up 49K of disc. The sheer size of it means it's CP/M Plus only. Even then, you're only left with 12K of RAM for the spreadsheet data. How then, you might well ask, can *ScratchPad* give you a larger spreadsheet than any other program?

It's all done with virtual memory. This involves using disc space to store data while the program is running. In this way, the spreadsheet is notlimited by the amount of free RAM. Once all this is used, *ScratchPad* starts expanding into the free space on your disc. This does have to be space on your working copy of *ScratchPad*, but that's not an enormous restriction – in theory, you could still create spreadsheets weighing in at over 120K.

Of course, there is a price to be paid for all this – and I don't just mean £70. The trade-off is one of size against speed. Retrieving data is much slower from disc than it is from RAM. With auto-calculation running, the change in speed is quite noticeable and potentially rather annoying. The answer here is to switch auto-calc off, and simply force recalculation when needed. This is, after all, what you have to do anyway with most spreadsheet packages. A more satisfactory solution would be ramdisc.

The idea of ramdisc is explained rather more thoroughly in the Silicon Disc review in this month's Plug-Ins, but here's the gist of it. You take a piece of RAM, make it pretend it's a disc and run virtual-memory programs on it. That way you get extra memory and extra speed – which can't be bad. Unfortunately for 6128 users, the DK'tronics Silicon Disk won't do the job – though the Vortex boards might be able to, at a price. Those lucky 8256 users have a built-in 112K RAM disk which really gets *ScratchPad* running at a cracking pace. The 8512 will be able to offer all this plus even *greater* capacity – 368K on ramdisc.

DIMENSIONS

With all this talk of 120K spreadsheets, it may come as a surprise to you that each sheet can have a maximum of only 5000-odd cells. Before you start making unfavourable comparisons, however, bear in mind a couple of points.

Many spreadsheet packages can show similar statistics, but very few have the memory to fill that many cells usefully. Furthermore, the cells of a *ScratchPad* spreadsheet can be distributed however you like – the dimensions of the sheet are entirely up to you. If you need 5 columns and 1000 rows, or vice versa, *ScratchPad* can handle this quite easily.

Putting these two factors together, the maximum number of cells is, unlike with so many packages, a practical limitation – but only if you need a sheet with an enormous number of columns *and* rows. Oddly enough, the package nearest to *ScratchPad* in memory terms – Campbell's *Mastercalc 128* – is also the only one of its major competitors to offer the same sort of flexibility over spreadsheet shape.

SPREADSHEETS

If you do all your financial planning on paper, you'll find some tasks very difficult. In particular, you'll have problems making "what if...?" calculations. If you're doing the planning for a small business, you're going to want to know the answers to questions like "What if component prices go up?" or "What happens if I become liable for VAT?". If you want answers to this sort of question, you're going to need a spreadsheet program.

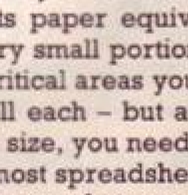
A spreadsheet is made up of **cells**, arranged in rows and columns. Each cell can contain a label, eg "Profits for January", or a **formula**. The formula in a cell is the way that the program works out what number to display in that cell on the screen. It could just be a number, or it could be a sum which the program can do to produce a number.

Thus if cell B1 – that means it's the cell in column B and row 1 – has the formula "10", then it will simply display as the number 10. If we then set the formula for B2 as "B1 + 5" then B2 will display as 15 – the contents of cell B1, plus 5. If we then alter B1's formula to "11" and **recalculate** – update all the cells according to their formulae – B2 will now display 16, not 15 as previously.

Using these formulae, we can set up a financial plan without having to do the totalling of costs, multiplication by profit margins etc. More importantly, you can make small "What if...?" alterations, and then recalculate the whole sheet to show their full effects.

WINDOWING

One of the most important features of *ScratchPad Plus* is its multiple windowing. The major drawback of a computer spreadsheet compared to its paper equivalent is the display size – you can only see a very small portion of the total display at any one time. Often, the critical areas you need to look at are small – typically just one cell each – but a long way apart. To make the most of the display size, you need to be able to divide it between these areas. On most spreadsheets your display can only look at one continuous area of screen. A few allow you to divide the screen into two *windows* – two sections of the screen



PAD PLUS

of Caxton's powerful new spreadsheet.

which show separate parts of the spreadsheet.

In contrast to this, *ScratchPad Plus* gives you unlimited windowing. You can split the screen into two separate windows, either horizontally or vertically. These windows can then be subdivided, and so on for as long as you like. There is a limit to the number of windows you can have on screen, but only the purely practical one of screen space. Each new window needs column and row markers, and these take up space otherwise used for cells. Eventually, the screen will become too cluttered for further subdivision. By this time there will already be too many windows for you to keep track of them all, so the limit isn't much of a restriction in practice.

Each window behaves like a screen in miniature. It can be scrolled and the entries edited quite independently of the other windows – except, of course, for the effect any editing may have on the spreadsheet. This, coupled with the ability to jump from window to window, gives you more direct access to the spreadsheet than any other program on the market.

FORMULAE AND FUNCTIONS

When it comes to calculation, *ScratchPad* really starts to show its worth – the range of commands available to you is simply phenomenal. From simple arithmetic you can move on to trig. and scientific functions, table lookups, and an if-then structure that brings in a strong flavour of programming.

Other useful features available include the ability to sum over a range of cells in the same row or column, without having to write formulae of the "A3+A4+A5+..." variety. Also worth a mention are the average, maximum and minimum functions which add considerably to the package's flexibility.

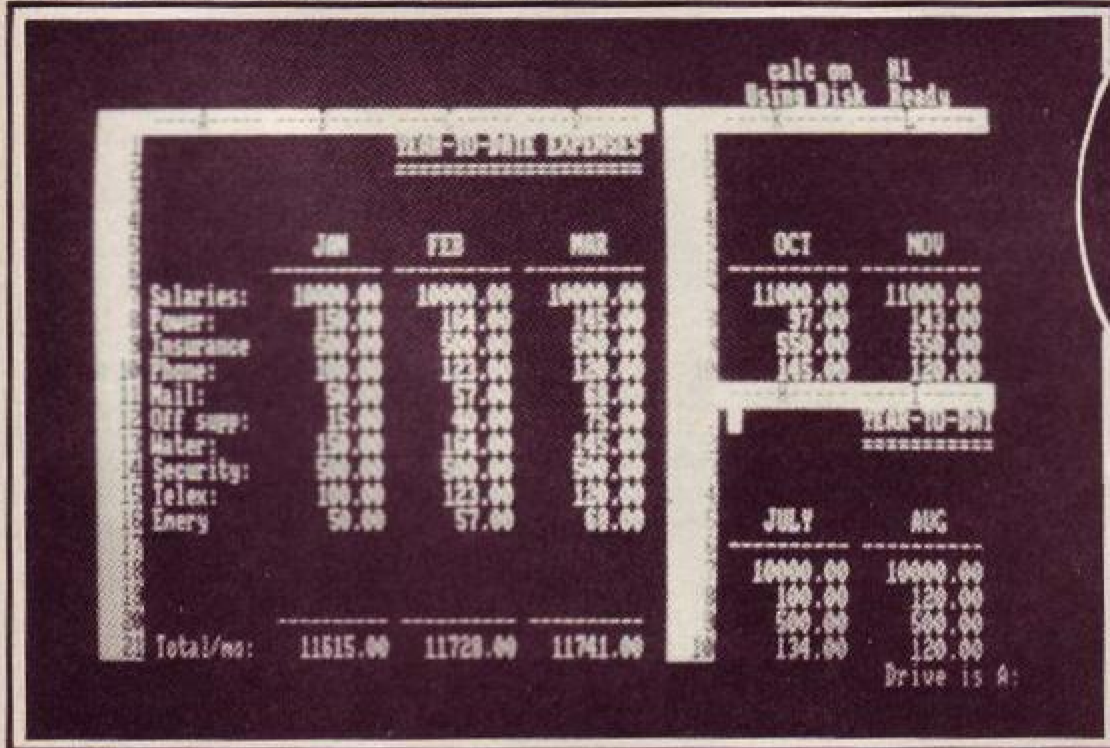
Thankfully, applying this battery of functions is made a great deal easier by an intelligent set of replication instructions. Formulae can be transferred as wholly absolute, wholly relative or a range of options in between. In effect, this means that concepts can be copied from one part of the sheet to another, cutting out an enormous amount of drudgery and general hard work.

DOCUMENTATION

This program packs a real punch – it can create and manipulate huge spreadsheets, give you powerful tools for structuring them and easy access to the results they yield. All of this clearly needs some pretty strong documentation, and Caxton have given it just that.

The manual is friendly, clear and concise. It is backed up by good onscreen help, a useful little prompt card and, when all else fails, a support team on the other end of the phone. If the documentation is lacking anywhere, it is in the area of examples. *ScratchPad* is very versatile for a spreadsheet, and a few suggested applications for the more unusual features would not have gone amiss.

Three separate windows of data make the spreadsheet much more useful – and there's more where they came from.



G O O D N E W S

- **Virtual memory allows enormous spreadsheets.**
- **Powerful formulae.**
- **Multiple windowing.**
- **Good documentation.**

B A D N E W S

- **Expensive.**

The Verdict

There being disconcertingly little to find fault with, the only question mark remaining is over value for money. At £20 more than *Supercalc 2* and almost twice the price of *Mastercalc 128*, you'll have some hard thinking to do justifying the expense. Above all, you'll have to really need that extra power and capacity.

SCRATCHPAD PLUS
Caxton, £69.99 disc only
CPC 6128, PCW 8256

THE ANIMATOR

Every man his own Walt Disney? We see if *The Animator* can put some spring in the steps of your drawings.

THE ANIMATOR

Discovery/Woolf Graphics, £14.95 cass., £17.95 disk

CPC 464, 664, 6128 *The Animator* is nothing to do with sprites. It calls itself an **inbetweener**. This means that you draw two pictures – the **key frames** – and the program then creates the frames in between. In other words, if you've drawn frames 1 and 20, *The Animator* does the rest for you by generating frames 2 to 19. It is then possible to add more key frames – 40 to 60, and so on.

The manual explains that although this is not the first program to use the inbetweening technique it has great advantages of speed. Normally, an inbetweening program would not be able to display frames faster than 10 per second since it would store each picture as a collection of lines and redraw them as it went along. But *The Animator* compacts each frame and so is able to to reach speeds of 25 frames per second. A cartoon on film would display 24 frames per second.

This speed makes animation very smooth, and also means you can animate almost anything – filled areas, curves, squiggles etc. – up to the program's limit of 500 lines per frame. Of course, you would probably have reached the limit of your patience well before raching that number.

Drawing commands

The Animator provides a number of drawing command to help you create the key frames that will be the basis of your animated sequence. **Polygon draw** allows you to draw triangles, squares, pentagons, even circles (a 24-sided polygon), quite simply. **Stippled fill** will allow to mix colours in the program's four-colour mode (*The Animator has three modes*). **Rubber banding** can be set on or off.

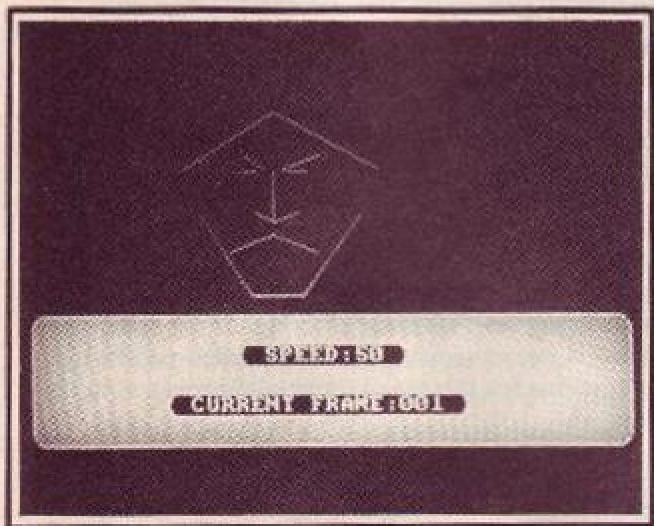
These commands are not as extensive as those offered by a program such as *Melbourne Draw* but they serve to help you on your way. However, *The Animator* also has several very useful commands you're unlikely to find elsewhere such as the **curve smoother**, which allows you to draw a line freehand and then smooth it out by joining up every 2nd, 3rd etc. point.

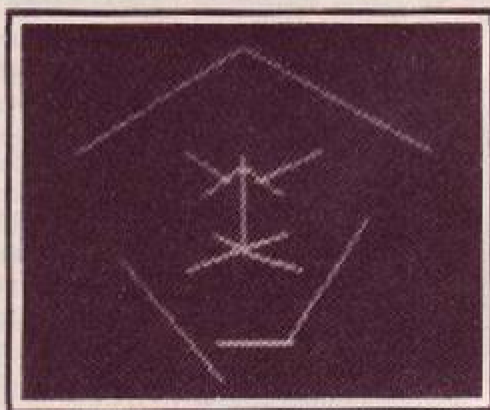
If you can't draw very well the **transform** command is very useful. This lets you copy and transform ready-made pictures or parts thereof. You can make them bigger or smaller, stretch them up or down, rotate them, or flip them over. Transform can be comobined with the editing facility **frame move**, which allows you to copy/move/delete frames. So, you could start with one frame containing a picture of a face, copy it to another picture and then go to work – broaden the nose, separate the ears, thin out the mouth and so on.

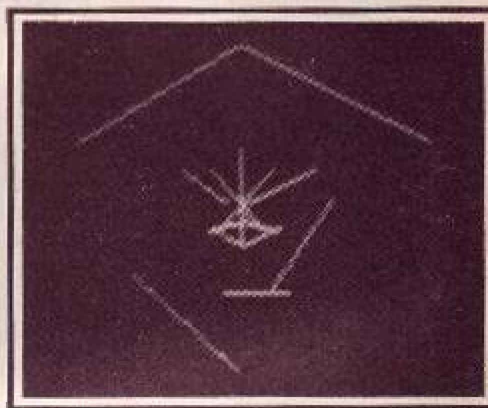
Frame rotate is a facility which spins the entire frame about the x or y axes to create a 3D effect. At the same time the program shows the lines in perspective view – it makes the lines longer or shorter as they appear to turn away.

Before running a sequence reverse can be set on or off. During the animation you can freeze frames, step forward or back frame by frame and alter the speed. If there are only a few lines the animation runs at 50 frames per second.

Unfortunately, if you then want to change the colour or add another key frame the program has to recompact the sequence. This can take some time if there is a large-ish number of frames, longer if some the shapes are filled.







Run-time module

However, there is a separate program for running a sequence without using *The Animator* – the run-time module. This allows you, for instance, to insert sequences in your own BASIC programs using the five RSX commands the module offers.

Several demos can be saved and held in memory at the same time. They can then be run together to form a much longer sequence.

How long?

The length of the cartoon you create depends on how much detail you want to include. On the 464 and 664 there is only 17K free for storing frames. On the 6128, however, there is over 80K available.

The manual claims that if you settle for a cartoon with just a few lines you can have sequences up to several hundred frames long. If you include filled shapes, however, the number of possible frames is reduced to around a hundred.

But by using the run-time module it should be possible to join two cartoons together, making the last frame of the first sequence the first frame of the second. This method would give you 37K free on 464 or 664, and over 100K on the 6128.

G O O D N E W S

- ▶ **Gives you some satisfaction almost immediately.**
- ▶ **A unique, and Amstrad-orignal, program.**
- ▶ **Extensive range of drawing and editing commands.**

B A D N E W S

- ▶ **Takes time to get to grips with it.**
- ▶ **Will take more time to create really impressive sequences.**
- ▶ **Not a lot of storage space on 464/664.**

The Verdict

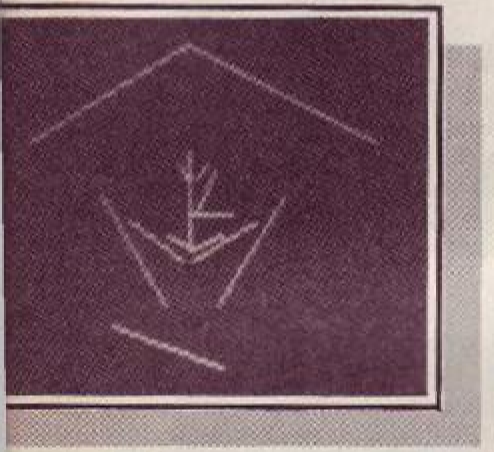
You might be wondering 'what's it for?' Well, it's not *for* anything in particular – except fun. Quite clearly, though, there are several applications – the creation of animated title sequences in programs is one that springs to mind. If you know enough about electronics to tamper with the TV modulator and output a composite video signal rather than a modulated signal you should even be able to save and build cartoons on video tape.

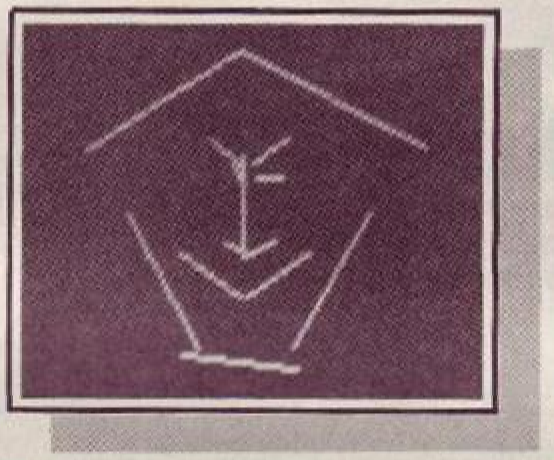
Essentially, though, it's a fun utility. It does what its title suggests – it creates animated sequences. If the idea of creating a cartoon appeals to you, you'll probably like it. After all, there is something magical aboout drawing a few lines and seeing them transformed into something quite different.

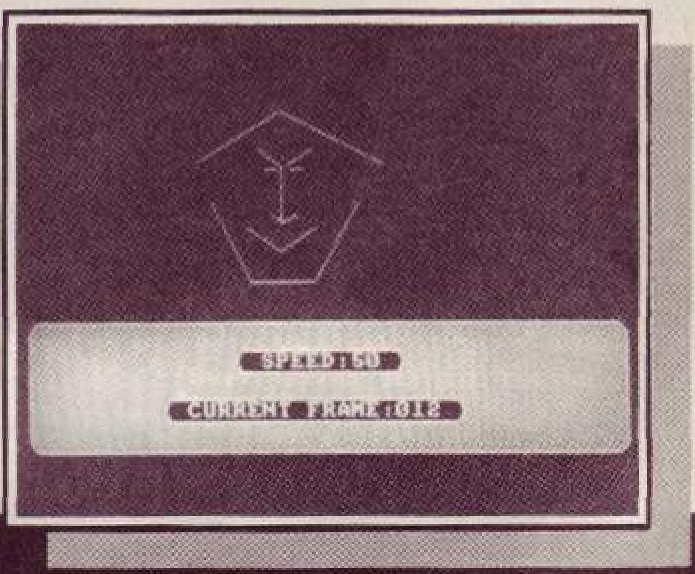
And it can be as easy as that. A couple of minutes will produce your first sequence. However, producing something of Walt Disney standard could take you a long time – not just in drawing the key frames but in working your way through the impressive arange of commands *The Animator* offers. One thing it *doesn't* offer, and which would have been useful particularly for the duff draughtsman, is an image bank to play around with.

It's really a case, though, of only getting out of it what you put in. The more you explore, the more satisfaction you'll derive – always assuming you're interested enough to get hold of it in the first place. It's certainly capable of giving you more pleasure than a lot of games I could mention.

From melancholy to merriment in a sequence created very quickly indeed, and using only two key frames – 1 and 12.







DISC DEMON

Beebugsoft £17.95 Disc, £29.95 Rom
464, 664, 6128

Following on from the success of their Amstrad *Toolkit*, Beebugsoft have brought out a new selection of utilities, this time with a leaning towards disc handling.

The utilities take the form of RSXs. These can be called directly, eg |DEDIT to edit the contents of a disc, or indirectly by way of the |DEMON command. The latter summons a menu, from which the utilities can be called without you having to remember the precise name of the RSX. This is very convenient, and something that other toolkit writers would be well advised to consider. It would be more useful, however, if the menu did not simply dump you back into BASIC after the completion of a command.

DISC COMMANDS

The commands themselves offer a wide range of activities. The more mundane provide AMSDOS alternatives to CP/M utilities – |COPY is equivalent to PIP, for example, while |DISCCOPY, |FORM and |VERIFY replace DISCKIT. Similarly, there are a few other housekeeping commands such as |WIPE, a selective erase, and |ACCESS, a file lock/unlock utility.

The remaining commands tend to be slightly more exotic. If you accidentally erase a file, |RECOVER will unerase it for you. If you want to see the disc area a given file occupies, |DMAP will display a sector-use diagram. Taking this to its logical conclusion, you can search and edit the disc directly using |DSEARCH and |DEDIT – but you'll need to be a bit of a hacker for this sort of thing.

MEMORY COMMANDS

If these last two commands are your sort of thing, *Disc Demon* can offer their memory equivalents, |MSEARCH and |MEDIT, and a memory dump command |MDUMP. Deeper still into hackery are |DIS, a memory disassembler, and |ENABLE, a Rom-enabling utility. The latter lets you bring the other memory commands to bear on the BASIC Rom, and any expansion Roms you may have.

Where appropriate, screen output can be directed to the printer by the commands |PON and |POFF. Also, file commands normally called in the form |COMMAND,<filename> can simply be typed as |COMMAND and the utility will then prompt you for the filename. On the 664 and 6128 this is merely convenient, but on the 464 it neatly avoids the RSX-handling problems of BASIC 1.0.

As a further convenience, the function keys are set up so as to produce useful *Disc Demon* commands. For instance, f9 calls up the |DEMON menu, f4 displays a help screen detailing command syntax and f7 switches the printer on. The use of keys f0-f2 to set the screen to modes 0-2 seems a little strange at first – "What's this got to do with *DD*?", you might well ask. The answer lies in the way some of the commands – notably |DEMON – behave. Though most of the commands work in any mode, a few switch to mode 1, and don't restore the previous mode afterwards. For these, the immediate switch back offered by f0 and f2 comes in very handy.

THE DRAWBACK

If all this sounds exactly what you need, there is one slight problem with it – its size. The disc version takes almost 16K of user Ram. Though this can be reclaimed using |DEMONOFF, there is no way to keep just some of the commands. You can't even dispose of the help messages. Of course, a hacker could probably fix this – but then a hacker could write his own utilities in the first place.

The solution, for my money, is to buy the Rom version. You'll need a Rom board to use it, and it costs a lot more, but that memory loss on the disc version really is a bit much.

SERIOUS SOFTWARE

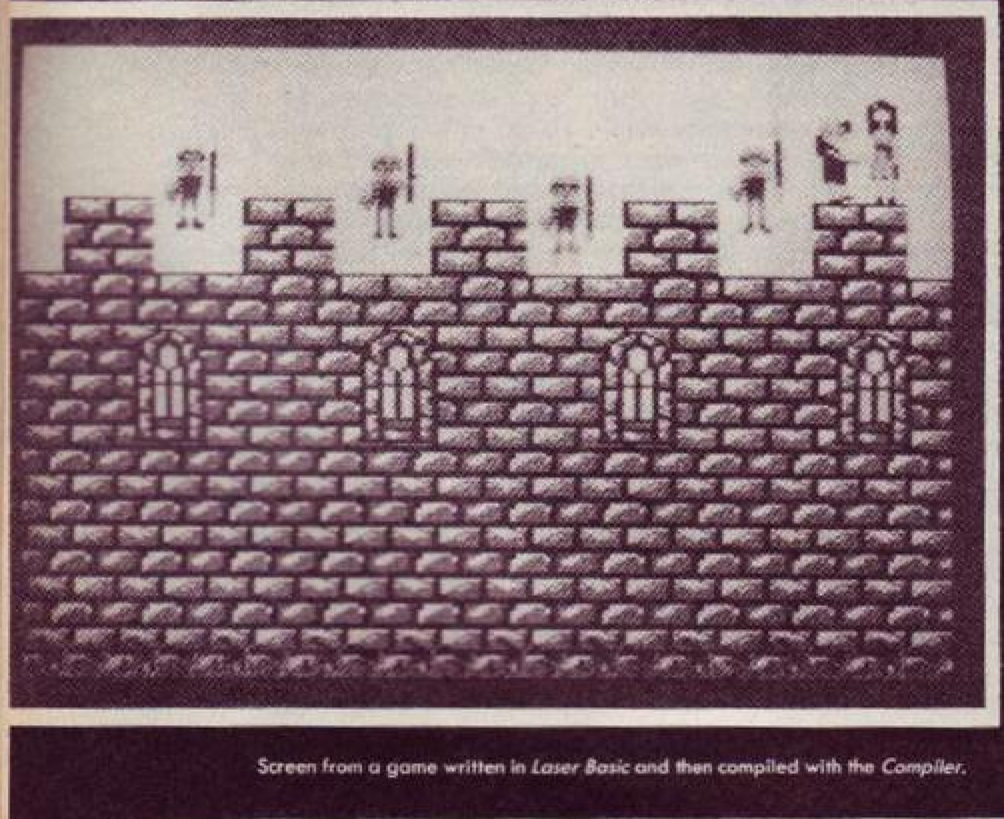
LASER COMPILER

The amazing Bertram Carrot reviews the latest Ocean/Oasis offering. Can it speed up the poor man's miserably slow BASIC? Will Carrot become a top-notch machine code progger?

For a long while now I've been working on *Curse of the Android Lemmings*, the latest Carrot megazap written entirely in BASIC and sporting one of the slowest gameplays known to mankind. So it was with much glee that I wrestled with the padded bag that arrived courtesy of Securicor a couple of days before this issue went to press. Just the job, I thought, to put some perzaz into the robot rodents.

The *Laser Compiler* is the latest in a line of programming aids for those who can't or won't 'get their hands dirty' with a bit of Z80 machine code. *Laser BASIC*, reviewed in February's Amstrad Action, does a lot for those who believe that POP IY is a funny spelling of Olive Oil's boyfriend. It provides all kinds of wizzo sprites for use in your own games, and machine-code routines to manipulate them.

Laser Compiler tackles the bits of program not directly concerned with putting lemmings on the screen;the calculation and program logic involved in a good game. When you've compiled a BASIC program with Laser, you'll notice a significant speed improvement, not in the sprites themselves, but in the way the program works out what to do next.



Screen from a game written in *Laser Basic* and then compiled with the *Compiler*.

Two sample programs are included in the manual; the notorious *Sieve of Eratosthenes*, invented by an ancient Greek to show off the speed of his BASIC compiler, and a routine to draw a circle. If you run these two programs under Amstrad BASIC against their *Laser* compiled equivalents, you'll see a speed improvement of 20 to 30 times for the Sieve and about 3 times for the circle plot. Well worth having, but what sacrifices do you have to make?

Well, for a start, you can't use any floating-point numbers. Not as much of a problem as you might think, especially when writing games, as nearly everything is done with integers anyway. It does mean that the RND function (which normally returns a number between 0 and 1) has to be rewritten, and any programs you want to compile will need to be adjusted accordingly. There are some restrictions on the use of MEMORY, and immediate mode commands, such as AUTO, RENUM and NEW, are not supported. Nothing that should really worry you, though.

Syntax checking

What is a bit more worrying is the 'fussy' syntax checking. If you write 'IF INKEY(32) THEN GOSUB 1000' in a program, you'll have to alter the line to read 'IF INKEY(32)<>0 THEN...' before *Laser* will accept it. It won't accept the Pascal-style square brackets around array elements e.g. DIM Array$[20], although Amstrad BASIC does, and was none to happy with the statement 'IF caught THEN RETURN'. It demands a full Boolean expression (e.g. caught = 1) to compile.

The manual gives details of which keywords aren't supported, and lists the error messages the compiler may produce. It would have been useful to have had some of these explained, and there were a couple the compiler produced which weren't listed, including the unhelpful 'RUNTIME ERROR-UNKNOWN ERROR, PROGRAM TERMINATED'. Considering how well *Laser BASIC* is documented, I think *Laser Compiler* deserves more than 15 pages.

The compiler

The compiler is generally well behaved, and will take your source BASIC, which should be thoroughly debugged, and compile it in two passes. The first pass checks the syntax, and reports errors, showing where in the offending line the problem lies. The second pass generates the machine-code, adding in the *Laser* run-time code to produce a stand-alone program. This code is quite lengthy, around the 10K mark, and is longer if your program includes *Laser BASIC* sprites. Using *Laser Compiler* is the only way to create a program with sprites which will run without *Laser BASIC* being present.

The final product is run only, and as such may be sold by you, without further permission from, or payment to Ocean. A very

realistic approach. Compilation of a typical 10K program takes about three minutes, including disc swaps. You can run the compiler from tape, but it's awkward.

Test programs

And so to *C.O.A.L.*, or at least the programs I tried it on before trusting it with the game which combats insomnia. I have to admit at this stage that in the time available for the review, I only managed to get one out of three test programs compiled and running under *Laser*. The first was a simple database, which reserves MEMORY for a couple of machine-code sub-routines. *Laser* rejected the use of HIMEM in the program, and a small re-write would be necessary to put the code into memory in some other way.

The second was a published BASIC listing for a game. *Laser* compiled the program without problem, but when run the 'UNKNOWN ERROR' described above, crashed my 6128.

The third program was another mag listing, and after quite a bit of rewriting, *Laser* compiled this to machine-code over twice as long as the original. Although this compiled program ran all right (and a good bit faster than the original), part of the screen display was corrupted. The interpreted version had no such problems, and it's hard to see what could be causing them.

Even with these problems, it's not fair to conclude that *Laser* won't compile fairly standard BASIC programs. If you were writing your program for compilation, you'd make sure you stuck to the syntax it could understand. Using *Laser BASIC* would also encourage this, as the routines provided there are all compatible with the *Laser Compiler*.

All in all, Ocean's two programming aids will work together to provide much of the sophistication normally found only in games written entirely in machine-code. The extra memory overhead of a compiled program should not be too much problem, bearing in mind the program space available in Amstrad micros.

Now, you see, these giant lemmings keep throwing themselves of the cliff and your job is to catch them in your wellies ....

Compiler v Interpreter

You may not be aware that your Amstrad micro, like all others, doesn't understand BASIC! There is a chip inside your computer, called the BASIC interpreter, which translates any program you write in BASIC into machine-code. All micros can understand machine-code, and act on the instructions an interpreter produces.

The trouble with doing things this way is that a lot of time is taken up translating each instruction. When you run a BASIC program, each command is translated as it is met. This means that every statement in a simple loop like this:

```
10 FOR N = 1 TO 20
20 PRINT "Curse of the Android Lemmings"
30 NEXT N
```

is translated 20 times! It's amazing BASIC programs run at any speed at all. The advantage, of course, is that no permanent change is made to your program, so you can view and edit it immediately if there's something wrong.

A compiler on the other hand, takes your program (known as the **source** code) and translates it once and for all into its machine-code equivalent – the **object** code. When you run the program, it's the object code which is executed, and no translation work is done at all. If there are bugs in your compiled program, though, you'll have to go back to the source program, correct it there and recompile before you can retest it.

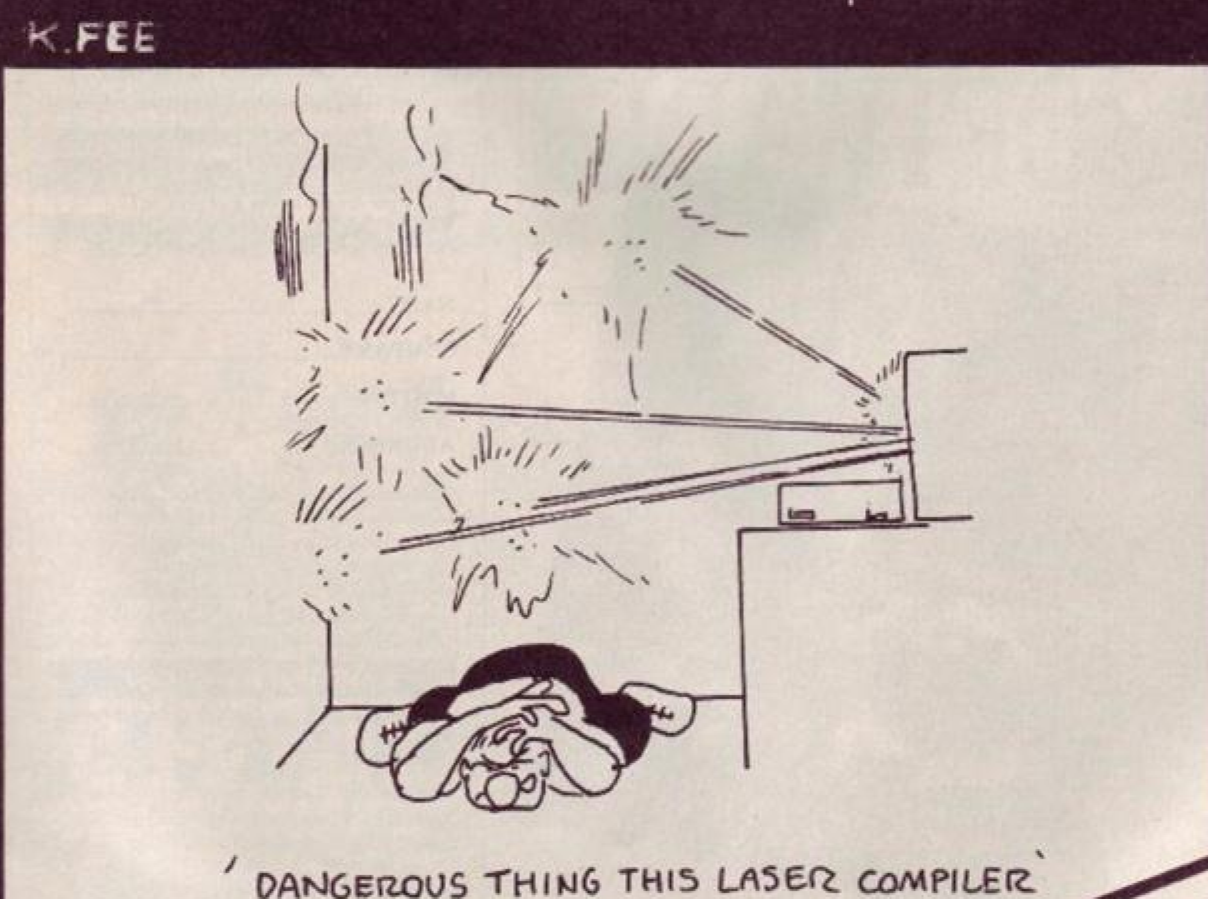
The best compromise, and one which *Laser Compiler* offers, is to take a program that you've developed and tested under the built-in interpreter, and compile it to give you extra speed.

G O O D N E W S

- ► **Handles a large subset of Amstrad BASIC keywords.**
- ► **Compiles fast, though in two passes.**
- ► **Produces stand-alone code, which may be marketed without royalties.**

B A D N E W S

- ► **Adds considerably to length of programs.**
- ► **Doesn't handle floating-point numbers.**
- ► **Manual could be more detailed.**



The Verdict

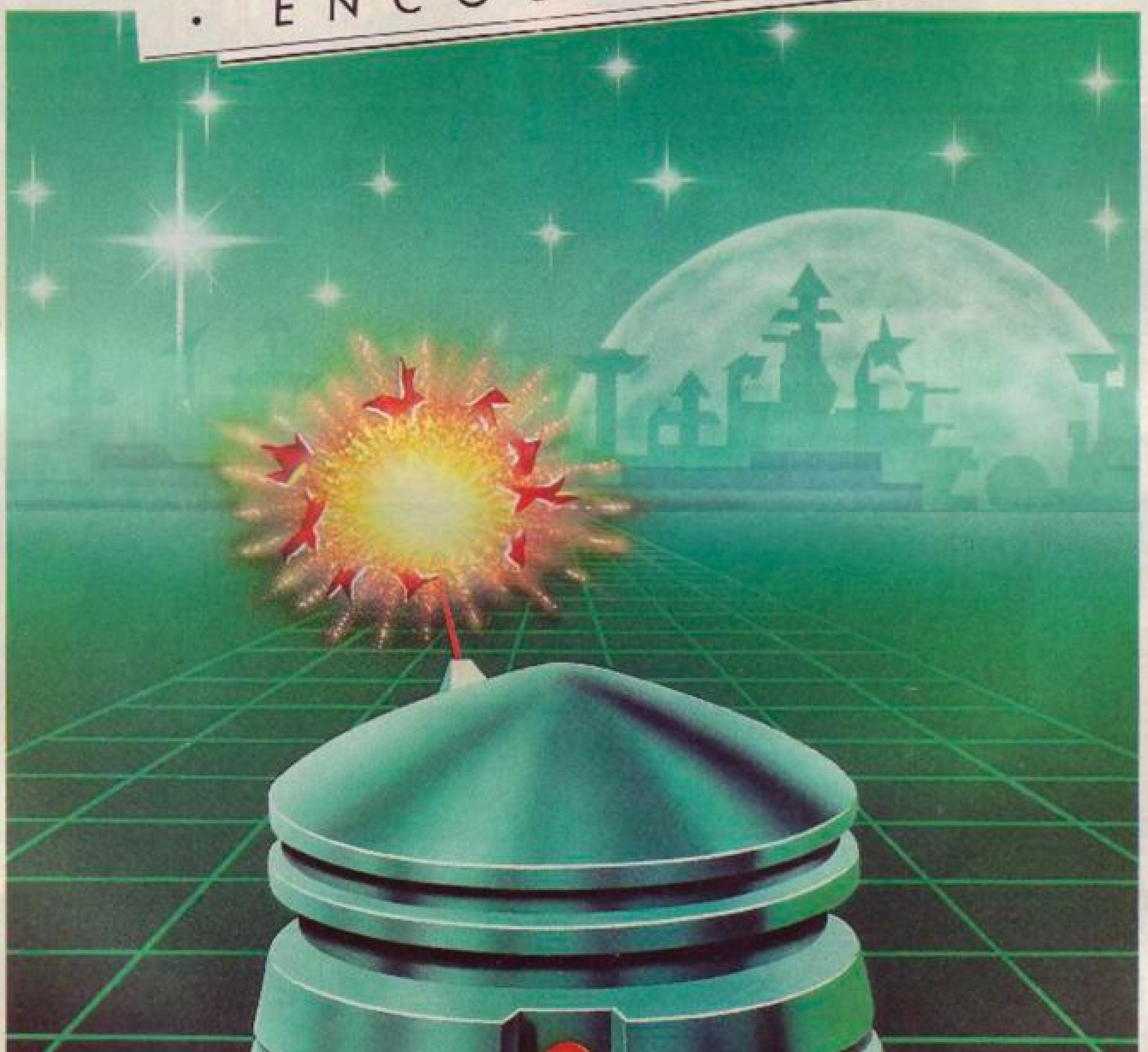
The *Laser Compiler* is a good integer compiler, though the review copy seemed a little rough round the edges. Although it won't provide a dramatic increase in graphics speed (*Laser BASIC* will do this for you) it considerably speeds up calculation and logic processing. It would be interesting to compare *Laser Compiler* with the new *HISoft Integer Compiler* (how about it, Ed, Sir?)

LASER COMPILER
Ocean/Oasis Software, £19.95 cass, £24.95 disk
CPC 464, 664, 6128


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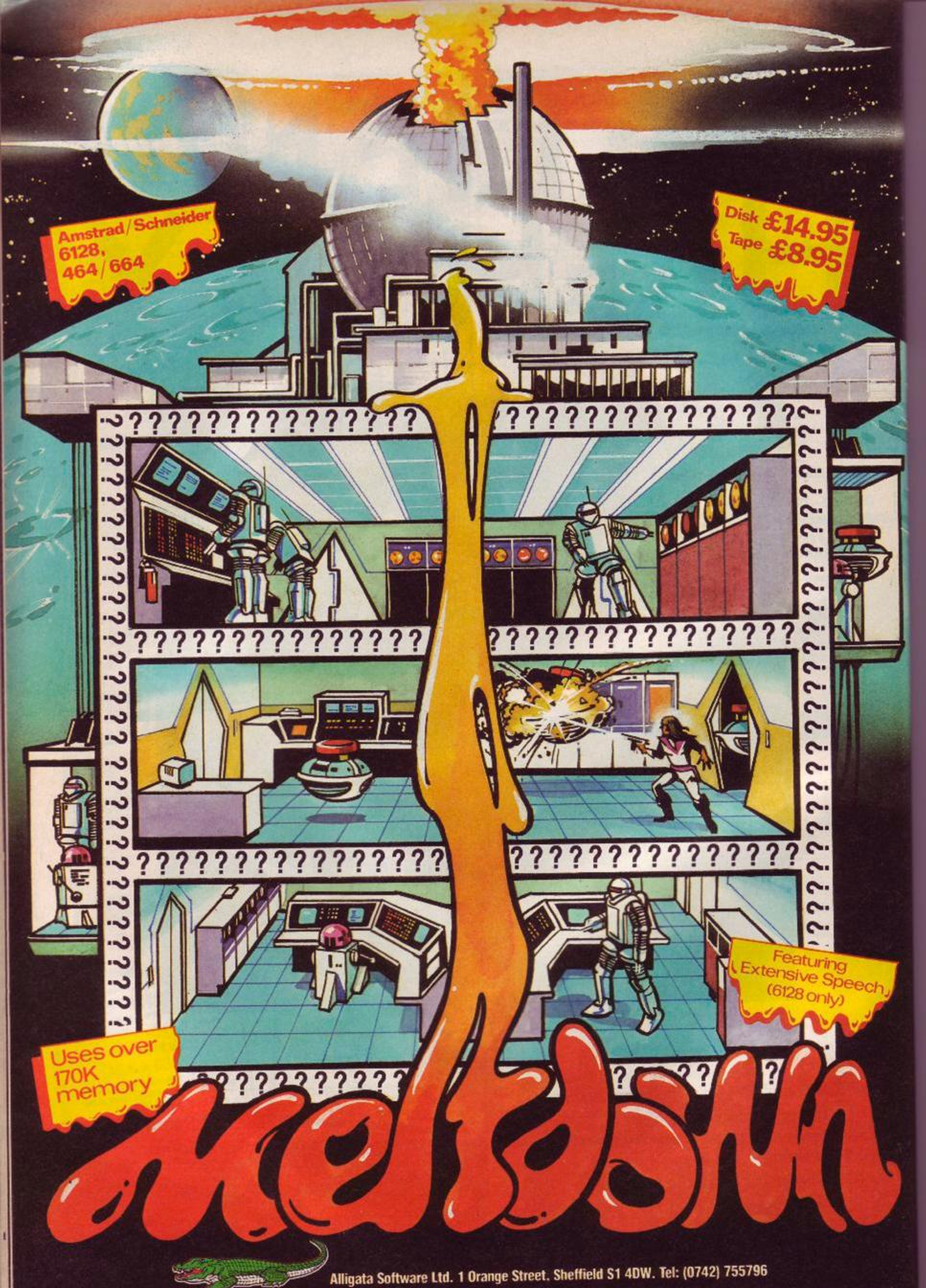
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SILICON DISC

256K SILICON DISC
£99.95, DK'tronics
CPC 464, 664, 6128

Andrew Wilton plugs in the DK Tronics 256K Silicon Disk and sees what it gets up to.

DK'tronics have already made a name for themselves among Arnold users with their 64K and 256K RAM add-ons. Now they're offering extra memory in a rather different form – a ramdisc.

A ramdisc is, as its name suggests, a cross between an add-on RAM and a disc drive. You can save programs on it, run CP/M on it, and generally do whatever you'd normally do with a disc drive. As far as Arnold is concerned, it *is* a disc drive. To us, however, there are important differences.

The main selling point of a ramdisc is its speed. Because it isn't actually a disc drive, it doesn't waste time running disc motors and doing similar jobs. This means it can handle data much faster – and make less noise about it, too. On the minus side, it is *volatile* – in other words, when you turn it off you lose all the data you had stored in it. Because of this, it can't replace but only add to other, conventional storage forms.

THE PACKAGE

Silicon Disc itself only works as part of a disc system – you cannot use it with a disc-less 464. It comes in two separate, similarly shaped units, one of which plugs into the other. One of these holds the actual ramdisc, and the other contains the ROMs that make the whole thing work.

The 464/664 versions are small, chunky modules plugging into the disk drive/expansion port. Any extra devices – notably the DDI-1 essential for use with the 464 – can be hung on the through-connector. The 6128 versions are much longer, stretching from the expansion port to the left-hand edge of the keyboard unit. As 6128 users may have already realised, this length of rear edge includes the printer port. Rather than block this port off, the two units give access to it via slots in the casing, forming a tunnel right through the assembly. In use this arrangement looks quite tidy, if a little odd – it was made necessary by the differences in port layout introduced on the 6128. Under the contrasting housings, the 464/664 and 6128 versions are electronically identical.

As with all expansion port plug-ins, the physical side of interfacing needs at least passing consideration. The review system – a 6128 package – gave some cause for worry on this score. Though the two component units fitted together snugly, the whole assembly seemed none too securely attached to the 6128 edge connector. The units rested on the desk once plugged in – though it wasn't too clear whether this was intentional, or just a consequence of the front module's rather loose grip on the connector.

Of course, physically poor connections don't always lead directly to electronic problems. By and large, the review sample behaved itself. Only once did it have serious problems – repeatedly crashing on start-up, or simply refusing to power up at all. The usual solution – turn off, adjust plug-in, turn on again – took half an hour and several dozen attempts to sort the problem out. This will come as nothing new to most plug-ins users, but it's still a powerful argument in favour of Vortex-style expansion boards.

AMSDOS

On power-up, the firmware adds the line "Silicon Disc 1.0" to the machine start-up message. The disc is not active at this stage. Typing |sdisc starts the package, implementing it as drive B if you only have a single drive system or as drive C if you have an FD1. From now on it is used in exactly the same way as a normal disc drive.

The major difference from a conventional drive is in performance. The increase in speed of saving and loading is dramatic, as the table shows. The improvement in BASIC file handling is not quite of the same order, but will probably be rather more useful. After all, the longest load/save you are ever likely to do still isn't going to take more than 20 seconds with a conventional drive.

There are a few other differences in its behaviour as compared to the genuine article. On cataloguing, the normal message "Drive B" is replaced by "sDisc B". This could easily go unnoticed, however, as the initial "254K free" will probably demand rather more of your attention. The extra space is very welcome, but it does have one problem.

The firmware features two commands, savedisc and loaddisc, which copy the contents of the Silicon Disc respectively to and from a conventional drive. Once you have 200K or so on the ramdisc the direct transfer out, using savedisc, won't work. What you're left with is a file handling task – a selective transfer, or at best deletion – which could prove very cumbersome under AMSDOS. If this sounds to you like a job for CP/M, then read on.

CP/M

Implementing Silicon Disc is simple under AMSDOS, but things can be a little trickier under CP/M. While still in AMSDOS, the external command |setcpm sets up the transient program SDISC.COM on disc. This in turn is used toset up the Silicon Disc once you have entered CP/M.

This is not quite the end of the matter, however. To get SDISC to work, you have to relocate CP/M, and to do *that* you have to use transient commands MOVCPM and SYSGEN from within CP/M. Fortunately you don't have to be a systems hacker to do this, because you don't actually have to understand any of it. All you need to do is follow the instructions in the manual.

Once you have your new, relocated CP/M you can implement Silicon Disk just by typing SDISC. There are a few points to note, though. For one thing, you can only use the Silicon Disk with this altered CP/M. For another, some utilities will only work with CP/M in its normal position. Thus you may well end up having two almost indistinguishable versions of CP/M in use – a rich source of confusion, no doubt.

None of this is particularly serious stuff – after all, the instructions are quite clear about the move operation. As for the effects of the relocation, 6128 users are quite used to handling different versions of CP/M. They are, however, the ones who will suffer from Silicon Disc's most serious drawback – that it is incompatible with CP/M Plus.

COMPATIBILITY?

At first, this seems too awful to be true. For a product such as this, produced in a special 6128 version, to be incompatible with the main 6128 operating system is a serious matter. Immediately the Silicon Disc loses many of the major applications for which its extra speed could have been such an asset. So why the incompatibility?

The problem, in a nutshell, is this – there is no CP/M Plus equivalent of MOVCPM, and without this you can't relocate CP/M in the way that Silicon Disc requires. If you try doing without and running SDISC anyway, you get a message to the effect that the disc has already been implemented.

Compatibility isn't just a problem for CP/M Plus programs, either. Of the packages that would really benefit from this sort of access speed, a good handful either crashed or failed to load. *Pyradev* – a big user of disc time during assembly – crashed spectacularly. Minerva's *Random Access Database* fared similarly, though this was rather less surprising. Most disappointing of all, Caxton's virtual-memory heavyweight *Scratchpad Plus* refused to load because of the small CP/M 2.2 transient program area.

SPEED COMPARISON

Task	Silicon Disk	FD-1 second drive
Loading 36K m/code program	3.0s	13.3s
Writing 1K ASCII file from BASIC	3.5s	7.9s
PIP transfer of CP/M 2.2 utilities	59s	138s
TYPE 8K text file	20s	23s

TECHNICALITIES

The difficulty with a ramdisc comes in making a piece of RAM behave like a disc drive. The secret of this lies not in the hardware, but rather in the firmware that comes with it. The Silicon Disc itself is physically a chunk of add-on RAM – and with the right additional software it should be possible to make it act like one, too. The firmware does not provide for this, however, as it has a rather harder job to do.

If we want to communicate with a disc drive, we normally do so via the disc operating system – DOS for short. On the Amstrad disc systems, this means either AMSDOS or CP/M. It is very unusual to access the disk drives by any other means. If the ramdisc can be read from and written to by the DOS in the same way that an additional drive would be, we will not have any problems using the vast majority of software packages with it.

The trick, of course, is to make the DOS read from and write to the additional RAM while appearing, to the user at least, to be handling a disc drive. CP/M and AMSDOS were not written with this in mind, so they have to be modified. This is where the Silicon Disc firmware comes in. Two external commands are provided, |setcpm and |sdisc, one for each operating system. Using these, the process of *patching* – that is, modifying – each system is quite straightforward.

GOOD NEWS

- **Very fast at data handling.**
- **Large (256K) capacity.**

BAD NEWS

- **Doesn't work with CP/M Plus.**
- **Doesn't necessarily save that much time in practice.**
- **Costs as much as an FD-1.**
- **Needs conventional disc back-ups.**
- **Doesn't have the firmware to double as an expansion RAM.**

VERDICT

There are doubtless some tasks – spell checking is an obvious example – for which the Silicon Disc is well suited. Against this one must set those applications for which it clearly isn't. As the comparative figures for TYPE show (see table), the speed difference on disc access is not very significant where the applications concerned have a lot else to do. My impressions of using *Pocket Wordstar* on there tended to confirm this. Of course, backing up was much quicker – but what use is a RAM back-up?

I suspect that normal backing up – to a conventional disc, that is – would lose you most of the time SD's extra speed gives you. In any case, normal precautions may not be enough. In addition to occasional unreported write failures and phantom "disc R/O" errors during data handling, the system crashed during a drive-to -drive data transfer. Alarmingly, this happened during the PIP speed trials for the comparison – and the SD manual recommends PIP for this use.

If the choice is between the Silicon Disc and a conventional second drive, the second drive must be the clear winner. The FD-1's flexibility, reliability and ease of use put it ahead even if you ignore CP/M Plus. As an extra for a twin-drive system, Silicon Disk could prove worth the money – but only if you have at least one definite speed-critical job for it to do.

STOP PRESS

Latest news from DK Tronics is that they are planing a CP/M Plus upgrade for the Silicon Disc. Details of price and release date are, as yet, unavailable.

SKYWAVE MULTIPORT/MODEM HOUSE VOYAGER 7
Skywave Software/Modem House £159.85

There is some controversy about this package – in particular, over whether or not it's actually legal to use it on the British Telecom network at all. Speculation on the subject may be interesting, but it does rather miss the point – namely, that the package isn't really up to much anyway.

In hardware terms the system breaks down into the usual RS232 serial interface and modem, the former holding the *Skycom* firmware that controls everything. The interface slots onto the expansion/floppy drive port, but makes a poor connection. Slight interface wobble can prevent the computer from powering up, or worse still crash *Skycom* while in operation.

Worse still, the interface housing doesn't fit the 6128 expansion port at all. A connector is supplied, but it is a very odd, uncased effort designed to step the PCB up to the level of the interface. All this is very primitive – it makes for even worse reliability, for one thing. Quite what would happen if you dropped a paper clip or staple on it I dread to think, but it certainly wouldn't do it a lot of good. A ribbon-cable connector would have made a lot more sense.

GOOD NEWS

- **Less expensive than the Pace package.**
- **Can auto-dial.**

BAD NEWS

- **May be illegal to use it.**
- **Clashes with CP/M.**
- **Unfriendly firmware.**
- **Weak documentation.**

Once you start using the system, you wonder why you bothered fiddling with the connection in the first place. *Skycom* isn't very friendly, and the manual isn't very helpful. The combination of these two factors means you'll spend quite a bit of time on 'seat of the pants' telecomputing, just typing things in and wondering what's going to happen. This is all very well if you really need the suspense. For myself, I like to know what's going on – and with *Skycom*, you don't.

Even once you've worked out what the manual doesn't tell you, it's still not very impressive. The text and symbols are MODE 1 only, which means you only get 4 colours on the display. As for telesoftware, the downloading seems to work OK but the start/length/entry addresses aren't on screen long enough for you to actually read them.

There are good points to the system, but not many of them. The modem does have auto-dial, but the magazine's automatic exchange meant we couldn't put this to the test. On the minus side, the system doesn't work with CP/M. In fact, CP/M won't boot even with the modem inactive – it simply gives an 'environment' error message. The only solution is to physically unplug the interface – not a very satisfactory state of affairs.

PACE NIGHTINGALE/COMMSTAR
Pace Micro Technology £172.50

The recent deal between Pace and Honeysoft brings us a package that really does offer the best of both worlds – good, solid hardware and slick, friendly firmware.

The Pace serial interface is free-standing, and connects with the expansion/floppy drive port via a length of ribbon cable. This makes for a much more secure connection than the dangling *Multiport* manages. If anything, the connection is a bit too secure. Swinging Arnold round your head by a bit of ribbon cable isn't a terribly good idea, but this connection feels like it would stand it. The review copy gripped like a vice, and unplugging it took a fair bit of effort. In practice, you won't have much call to disconnect it – it causes none of the 'enviromental' problems you get with *Multiport*. If it wasn't for its power-up message, you'd never know it was there – until you come to use it, that is.

Once in use, the interface's *Commstar* firmware starts to show what it can do. To call the system user-friendly doesn't really do it justice. The extensive use of pull-down menus simplifies things so much that the manual seems almost unnecessary. The package takes all the work out of telecomputing, and is generally a delight to use.

Of course, you can't always manage without a manual. When you do have to check up on something, however, you can be pretty sure the *Commstar* documentation will cover it more than adequately. Sad to say, plug-ins manuals tend to be very poor, and the *Multiport* documentation is probably not far below average. Against this background, the *Commstar* manual is a remarkably thorough and professional piece of work. It's clear and helpful at novice level, while its technical depth will earn it a place on any hacker's bookshelf.

GOOD NEWS

- **Easy to use.**
- **Great manual.**
- **Reliable.**

BAD NEWS

- **Not cheap.**
- **No auto-dial.**

ELECTRIC STUDIO LIGHTPEN MK II
The Electric Studio, £19.95 cass, £29.95 disc
464, 664, 6128

The Electric Studio Lightpen has long been one of the better graphic add-ons available for the Amstrad machines. The high quality of the software and the wide range of options available made it a very attractive proposition in its original version. Now, however, Electric Studio have released their new Mark II pen. So what's the difference?

The first thing you notice is the interface. Instead of the old chunky affair perched precariously on the expansion port, there is now only a simple edge-connector. This looks and performs much better than the original, making a more reliable connection and putting less strain on the expansion bus.

Also, the software is improved. The original package only worked in mode 0. Now you can use the pen in any of the three screen modes – though you do have to load a different drawing program for each mode. There is no need to calibrate the Mark II pen – you can simply plug it in,load the software and use it. As before, the use made of icons is good and the documentation thorough.

The only drawback with the new pen seems to be the business end of the pen itself. This is considerably blunter, making it a lot harder to see what you're doing. It appears that the nose cone has been cut shorter on the new model – possibly to improve performance – but that otherwise the pen is unchanged.

GOOD NEWS

- **No clumsy interface.**
- **Works in all three screen modes.**
- **No need to calibrate.**
- **As good for you now as it's always been.**

BAD NEWS

- **The pen is a bit blunt.**

COMPETITION

OCEAN SPECTACULAR!

25 pairs of *Batman* and *Frankie* are the prizes in this exceptionally exciting competition

They're both AA Raves this month – and they can BOTH be yours if you get the right answers to a few simple questions. Here at last is the chance you've been waiting for to display your knowledge of the history of Batman and the mega-group Frankie Goes To Hollywood.

Don't worry, though – you don't need to be Mastermind to answer these questions. And even if you don't have a clue yourself, you're bound to know someone who does.

What you have to do

There are two sets of multiple-choice questions, one on *Batman* and another on *Frankie*. All you have to do is select the correct alternatives, right them down on a postcard or the back of an envelope and send them to *Ocean Competition, Amstrad Action, The Old Barn, Somerton, Somerset.* What could be easier? The closing date for entries is Thursday 8th May.

1. Which of the following three biscuits is a fiendis[h] foe of Batman?
a. Bandit
b. Club
c. Penguin

2. What was Batman's real name?
a. Bruce Wayne
b. Bruce Wade
c. Bruce Grobelaar

3. Who was Gotham City's Chief of Police?
a. O'Hara
b. O'Mara
c. O'Tara



The Frankie Pleasurequestion[s]

1. What was FGTH's first hit single?
a. Shaddap your face
b. The Birdie Song
c. Relax

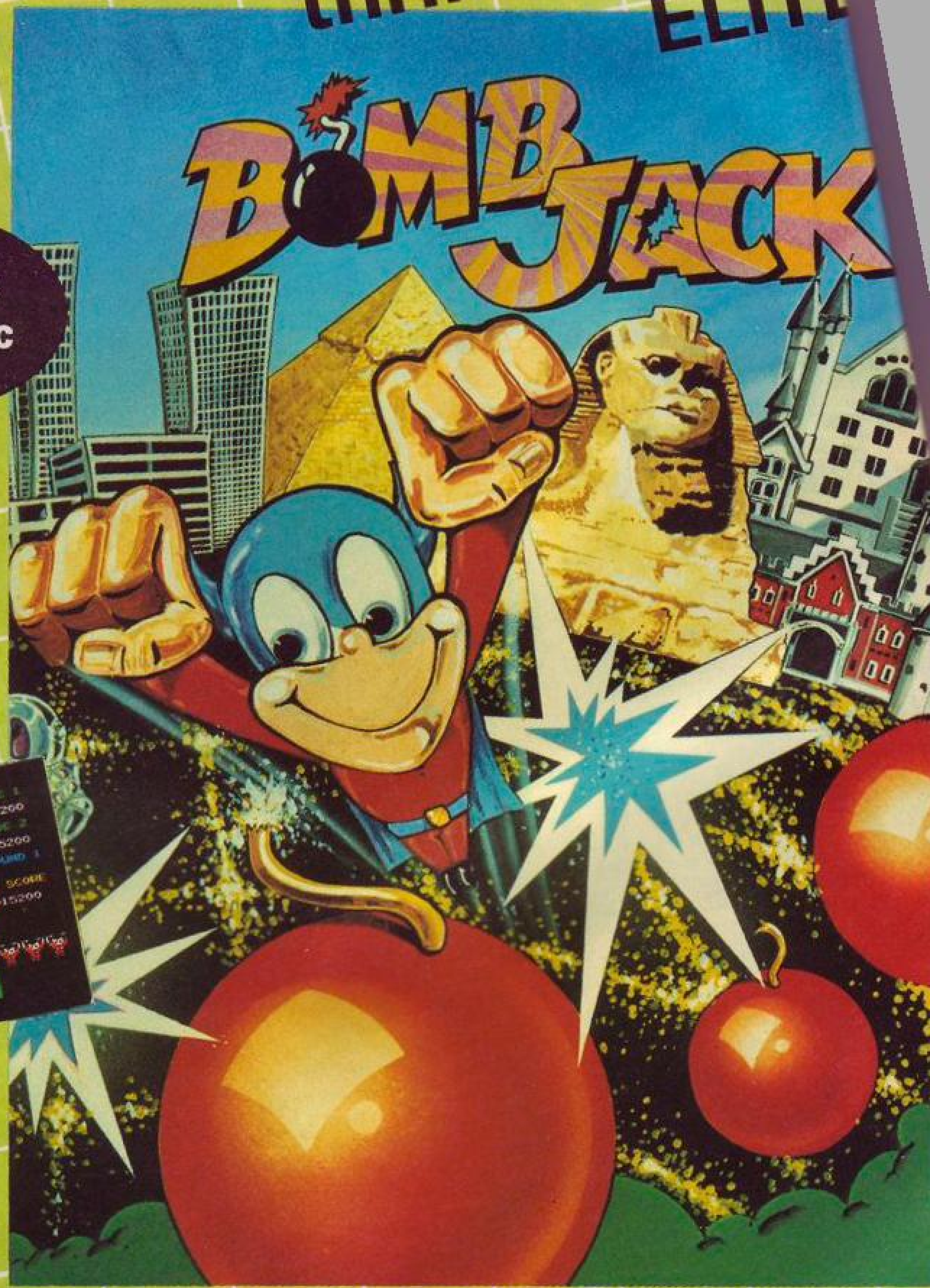
2. Who built the pleasure dome?
a. Kubla Khan
b. Marco Polo
c. Catherine the Great

3. Who is FGTH's lead singer?
a. Holly Golightly
b. Buddy Holly
c. Holly Johnson

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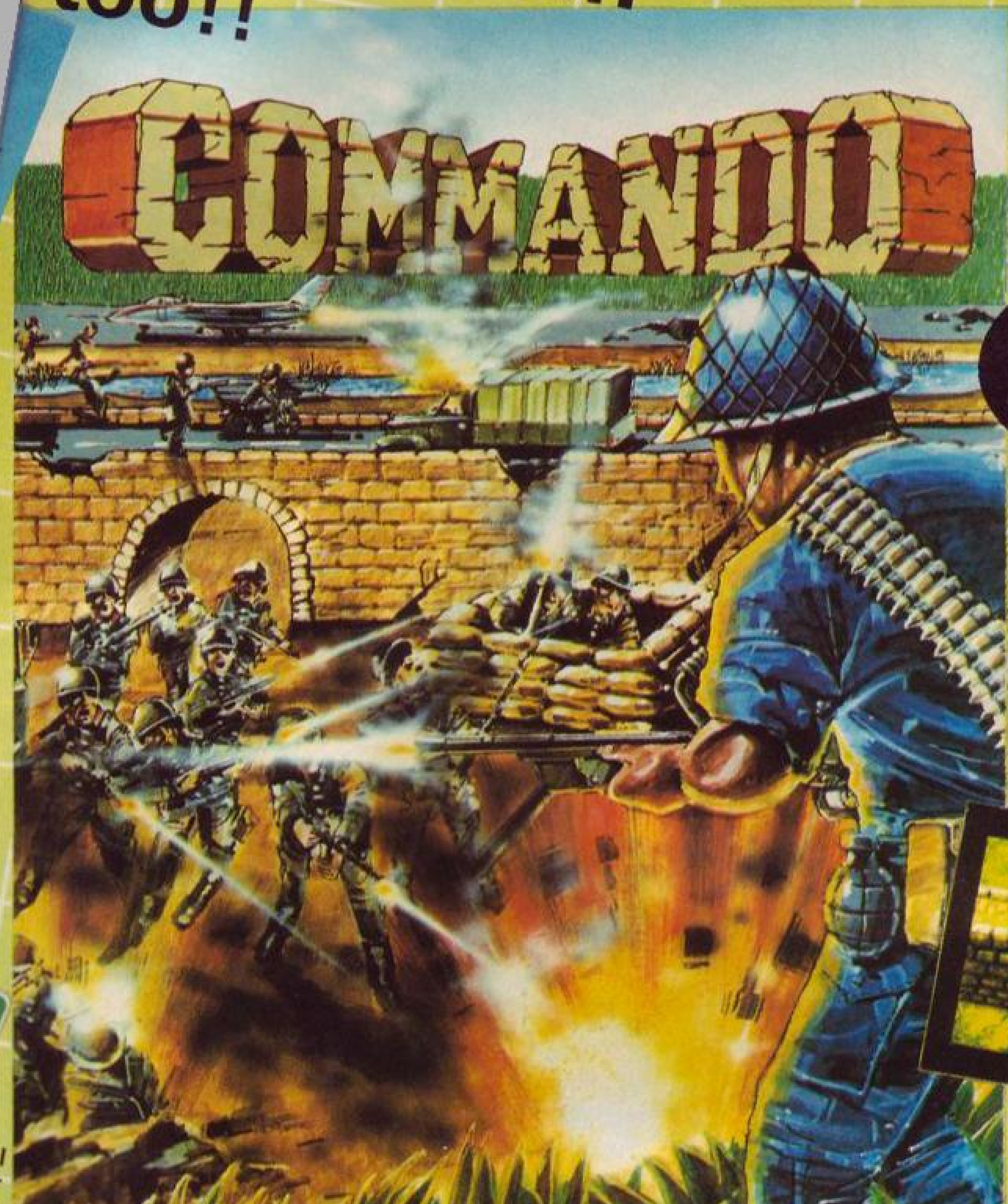




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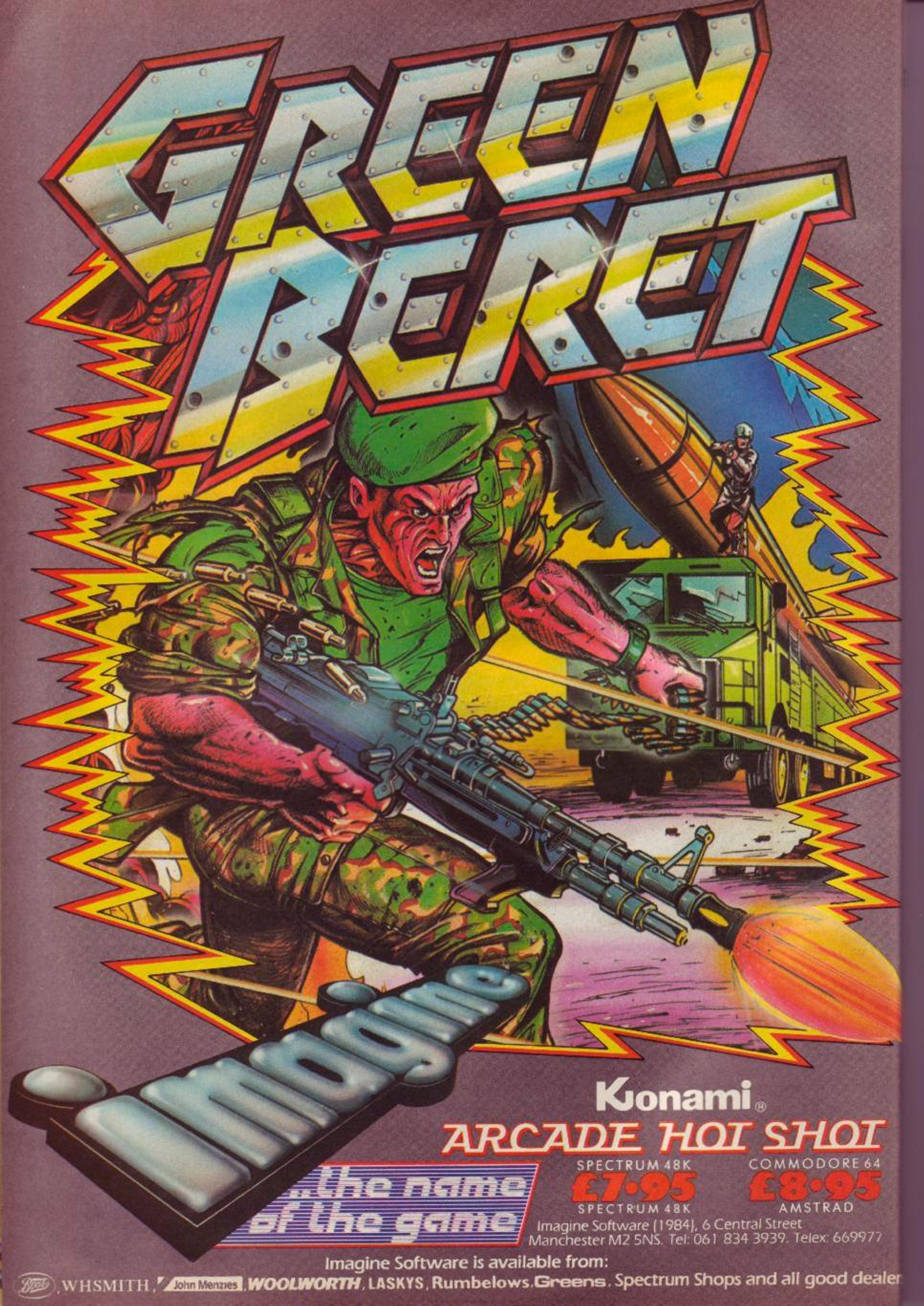


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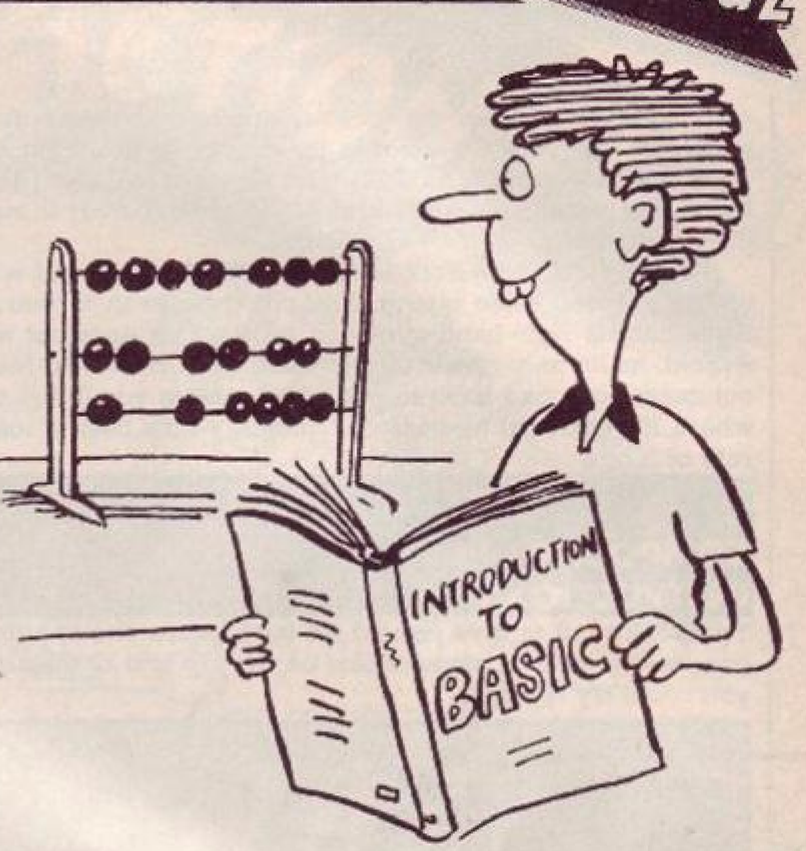
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Special

Absolute Beginners

The first in a series of articles by Andrew Wilton which will take you from complete ignorance to COMPLETE mastery of BASIC

Cartoons by Kipper Williams from the book *Warning – This Computer BYTES!*, published by Javelin Books at £1.95.



How to use this article

You can read any amount of theory about computers, but there's no substitute for *hands-on* experience – learning at the keyboard. To get the most from the article, sit down in front of your Amstrad, turn it on and type in the examples as you come to them in the text. Don't worry about remembering everything as you go – there's a summary at the end of the article.

The article assumes that you know how to set your Amstrad up and switch it on, but as little else as possible. Because of this it may start too simply for some of you. Don't worry – you will be able to join at further instalments without any problems.

WHAT IS BASIC?

Basic is a computer language – a way of telling a computer what to do. Computers are machines which obey instructions, but these instructions must be in the right form. If you type in something which Arnold doesn't understand, you'll get an **error message**– a piece of text printed up on the screen telling you you've done something wrong. Don't worry if this happens. Typing in nonsense won't damage the computer in any way.

If you haven't already switched your Amstrad on, do so now. If you have a 464, the screen should read:

```
Amstrad 64K Microcomputer (v1)
(c)1984 Amstrad Consumer Electronics plc
    and Locomotive Software Ltd
BASIC 1.0

Ready
```

If you have a 664 or 6128, there will be slight differences. The word "Ready" is a **prompt** – it invites you to do something. To be specific, it invites you to give Arnold new instructions, as he has nothing to do at the moment. The rest of the text on the screen is the **start-up message**. This is rather like the title page of a book – it serves no real purpose, other than to let you know that the computer is working OK.

Since we're going to be doing quite a bit of work on the screen, we might as well start by clearing off the clutter of the start-up message. We'll try doing this in English, first. Type CLEAR THE SCREEN and press the return key – you should get the message "Syntax error", and the "Ready" prompt. The "Syntax error" means that Arnold didn't understand what you typed in, and the "Ready" prompts you for more instructions.

If we want Arnold to clear the screen, we have to give him his instructions in Basic. Type CLS and press the return key – if all is well, the screen clears and the "Ready" prompt appears in the top left-hand corner. CLS is the Basic command which tells Arnold to clear the screen. If it didn't work you probably typed it wrong, so try again.

TYPING COMMANDS

It makes no difference whether you type commands in capital or lower case letters, or even a mixture of the two – Arnold takes such things in his stride. What he cannot cope with, however, are spelling mistakes. Type CLSS or CSL and you will simply get the "Syntax error" message. Even where the intended word is obvious to human eyes – RESTOR instead of RESTORE, for example – Arnold will still refuse to accept the offending command.

If you notice a typing error before you press the return key, you can correct it. Use the left and right arrow keys to move the cursor over the mistake. Now remove any unwanted letters by using the DEL key, or insert missing ones simply by typing them in the normal way. Once you are satisfied with the instruction, press the return key as usual. Pressing the return key tells Arnold that you've finished typing the instruction and want him to carry it out. You must always press the return key after typing an instruction – Arnold won't act on it until you do.

PRINTING

Now we know how to clear the screen, the next step is to learn how to write to it. Type...

```
PRINT "AMSTRAD ACTION"
```

making sure to use the double quotes on the 2 key. Press the return key. Arnold should now print the words AMSTRAD ACTION on the screen, followed by "Ready". You can, if you like, print any piece of text you like by putting it in between the quotes. Thus, PRINT "FRED WAS HERE" will make Arnold print up FRED WAS HERE. To save time, you can use a question mark in place of the word PRINT. Thus...

```
? "AMSTRAD ACTION"
```

...has the same effect as the earlier example. Try it out – also try using different phrases in the quotes. Arnold does not

care what you put in the quotes. Spelling mistakes are no problem – he prints the words up exactly as you type them. They can be complete nonsense, for all he cares. The point is, **he knows what you want him to do.** As for what it means, that's your business.

Using a question mark instead of PRINT is a useful way of saving yourself some typing. You could go even further, and leave out the right-hand quotation marks. This does not worry Arnold, as he only needs the left-hand pair. However, leaving out quotes is a bad habit to get into. Later on you'll find cases where it's essential to close the quotes, so it's best to make a rule of it now.

COMPOUND INSTRUCTIONS

You don't have to give Arnold his instructions one at a time. If you want to print a piece of text on the top line of the screen, you could try typing...

```
CLS

PRINT "TOP LINE?"
```

...and pressing return again. As you can see, this doesn't work. Though Arnold does clear the screen when you type CLS, he immediately puts the "Ready" prompt on the top line. What's more, you then have to type the print command on the next line, so that "TOP LINE?" is actually on line three of the screen. We want to give Arnold both instructions at once. Type in...

```
CLS:PRINT "TOP LINE?"
```

...and press return – but only after you've typed the whole thing. Now it works. Not only do the commands you've typed in get wiped off by the CLS, but also there is no "Ready" prompt until after "TOP LINE?" has printed up. Arnold only puts the prompt up when he needs more instructions – he doesn't put one up after the CLS, because he still has the PRINTing to do.

Look again at the line of instructions that did the trick. The two commands are put on the same line, and separated by a colon. This is the standard way of giving two commands in one go. You can give Arnold more than two commands at the same time, provided you put colons between all of them, and press the return key only after the last command. Try this –

```
CLS:PRINT "YOU'LL HAVE TO BE QUICK TO READ THIS":CLS:PRINT "BUT YOU CAN TAKE YOUR TIME WITH THIS"
```

A series of instructions like this is called a **compound command** or **multiple-statement line.** There is no limit to the number of separate instructions a compound command can have – there is, however, a limit to how *long* the whole thing can be. The maximum length of a compound command – indeed, the length of any piece of text – is measured in *characters.*

A character is a space, a number, a letter, or some other symbol. Thus...

```
CLS:? "Only £1.50"
```

...is 18 characters long. If you make it less, you're probably forgetting to count the spaces. Now, a compound command can only be 255 characters long – Arnold just won't let you type any more than that.

As you will have noticed from the examples, a compound command can take more than one row of the screen. In fact, with a screen 40 characters wide it can take the best part of seven screen rows. There's no problem with this – as you type, the text just overflows into extra rows as it needs them. This overflowing, or *wrapping* as it is properly known, has no effect on Arnold's understanding of the text itself. However many rows of text you type before you press the return key, Arnold still reads the whole thing as if it was all one long line.

MODE CHANGING

When you switch on, Arnold is in 40 character mode. That is, you can fit 40 characters on each row of the screen. For some purposes, you might not want this. You might want larger characters so that text is easier to read, or smaller ones to fit more on screen. You can change the width of the characters, and thus the number you can fit on each row, using the command MODE. Just type the word MODE, then a space, and then a number from 0 to 2. MODE 0 gives you 20 characters to a line, MODE 1 gives you 40 – the start-up setting – and MODE 2 gives you 80. Try typing the following...

```
PRINT "What happens when you change mode?":MODE 0
```

...and you'll notice that the screen clears. It's as if MODE had a built-in CLS. Type the same thing again, and you'll see that the screen clears even though you're already in MODE 0.

If you type in a MODE command without leaving a space before the mode number, you get a **Syntax error** message. Other kinds of mistake produce other error messages. The mode number is known as the **operand** or **argument** of the MODE command. Thus typing the word MODE on its own gives you an **Operand missing** message, while using a number outside the range 0-2 gives you **Improper argument.**

SUMMARY

If you want give Arnold a series of instructions so complex that it takes more than 255 characters, you'll have to write a **program** to do it. Next month we'll be going into what a program is, and how you go about writing one. We'll also be dealing with simple graphics. For now, let's just have a recap.

BASIC is a way of telling your computer what to do.

COMMANDS can be typed in upper or lower case, but must be spelt correctly.

The RETURN key is the way you tell Arnold to carry out the commands you've typed in. Press it to tell him you've finished typing the current command.

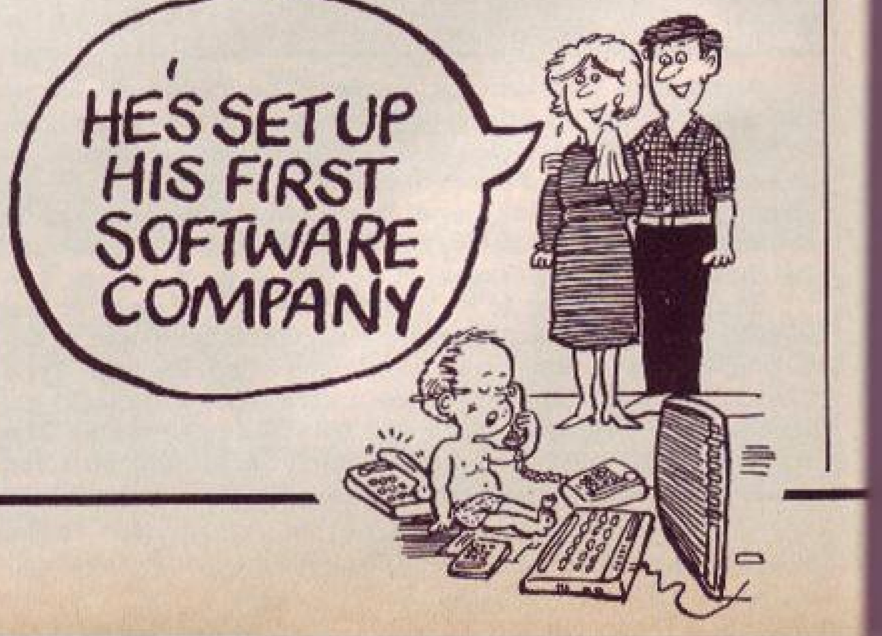
COMPOUND COMMANDS are used to give Arnold several instructions in one go. They are made by joining commands with colons, and pressing the return key after the *last* command only.

CLS clears the screen of whatever was previously on it.

PRINT writes a piece of text to the screen. The text is put in quotes after the command itself. To save typing, you can use a question mark as an abbreviation for the command.

MODE changes the number of characters that fit on one row of the screen – it also clears the screen. MODE still works even if you tell Arnold to "change" to the mode he is already in. Then, it simply behaves like CLS.

The OPERAND or ARGUMENT of a command is an addition specifying how the command is to work, or what it is to work on. The operand of the PRINT command is the piece of text that is to be printed. The operand of the MODE command is a number between 0 and 2, specifying which mode Arnold is to change to.



ACTION TEST

THE ALL-ACTION REVIEWING SYSTEM

Try whistling the *Marseillaise* while you read this. This month we have our first ever French Mastergame – and a brilliant piece of work *Get Dexter* is, too.

But, 'Britons never, never, never' etc. *Batman* is not far behind, and in any other month would probably have scooped that coveted Mastergame position.

Elsewhere there are some really tasty games, including a Rave that will get your brain cells in motion – *Colossus Chess*. It might not be as pretty as *Cyrus*, but it plays a mean, mean game.



1. EXPERT GAMEPLAY. No game gets written up until it's had a long and thorough test. Take software editor Bob Wade. Despite his tender years and sensitive soul, he's pretty deadly with a joystick and happens to have played virtually every Amstrad game ever released. As they say down in these parts, BW reaches the parts other reviewers can't touch.

2. EXTRA OPINIONS. It's always dangerous to rely on just one reviewer – tastes vary enormously . So all the games we review get not just one, not a mere two, but THREE opinions. As well as more variety in the comments, it means we now have even more reliable ratings.

3. LABELLED SCREEN SHOTS. It's obviously important to print screen-shots, but often they can be hard to make sense of. Labelling the different elements can make all the difference.

4. CLEAR SUMMARIES. Ever read a review where you ended up confused about the verdict? No chance of that happening here. To make our own views crystal clear we include a concise summary under the Good News/Bad News headings.

5. RATINGS BOXES. We rate our games using percentages for extra flexibility and precision. And with so many games to work through, it's a help to see at a glance which are good and which aren't. Our ratings boxes do this – just look out for the games with long bars and dark tips.

6. GREEN SCREEN VIEW. Some people have to make do with a green screen monitor for their games. Our Green Screen View lets them know if they're worth the effort of loading.

AA Ratings – how they work

We've come up with five different headings which, we reckon, cover all that's important about a game. The most important is the final one which represents our overall assessment of it. Games which score 80% or higher earn the much sought after label of AA RAVE, while the highest rated game in any month becomes our MASTERGAME – we go through agonies before selecting that one.

The ratings categories are meant to be fairly self-explanatory, but that wasn't why we didn't print anything about them last issue – we just ran out of space! So here are the missing explanations. Hopefully you'll agree our categories make a refreshing change from the usual.

GRAPHICS is the first category. Basically, this means, er, what the game looks like; colour, definition, animation, imagination. It's safe to say that monochrome Noughts and Crosses will score fairly low.

SONICS next. Sweet music, horrible noise, silence, all will be rated on quality and quantity. This rating involves the use of ears.

GRAB FACTOR We think you'll like this one. Does the game really GRAB you? Are you hooked? Will you miss an episode of The Archers to play it? High Grab Factor means that the whole office abandons work, Bob Wade whoops with delight and even the publisher looks mildly pleased. 100% means the game is more addictive than cider.

STAYING POWER You may have got the habit, but how long are you going to keep it? Staying Power tells you how often you're likely to return to a game. That depends on such matters as the number of screens and levels, the variety of the task, the degree of long-term challenge. An addictive game with only a couple of screens to it will get a high Grab Factor and low Staying Power, one with a 1000-screen playing area but lacking in playability would be the other way round.

AA RATING Nothing to do with cars. This is the result of a very hard sum involving all the other ratings, plus factors like price, quality of packaging and instructions, reliability and any other relevant factors we can think of. You won't go far wrong with any game over 80%.

Compatibility

All the games reviewed in this month's Action Test are compatible across the range, with the exception of *Kaiser* and *Indoor Soccer*, which do not run on the 6128.

CLUEDO

Leisure Genius, £9.95 cass, £14.95 disk

Whodunnit? To find out you'll have to play *Cluedo*, Leisure Genius's latest board-to-computer conversion. As just about everyone in the country must know, *Cluedo* is a game for up to six players in which the winner is the one who, by a combination of skill and deduction, discovers the culprit, victim, and the object used in a foul murder.

The player does this by making a series of 'suggestions' – e.g. 'I suggest that Bob Wade murdered Pete Connor with the Joystick in the Dark Room.' If any of the other players have the cards relating to those things, then they must say so. In this way you can eliminate a number of possibilities and deduce which cards have been set aside as the murder cards.

SECOND OPINION

It's a pretty good implementation of the board game – good news for all fans. However that does leave a lot to be desired if you don't like the board game. It saves on all that grubbing around with paper and pencils but still needs to be played as a multi player game to get the best out of it.

BW

Computer *Cluedo* works in the same way. Up to six people can play, or the computer can play up to five of the roles. Graphically, the game does not stun you with its brilliance. Each character is represented by a picture in the top right corner. Unfortunately, they consist of crude heads with red blobs on their cheeks and really cannot be said to exploit the Amstrad's graphics potential. Tudor Close, the country house where the whole business takes place, is represented either by a ground plan, or by a small picture of a room when an accusation is made.

Sound consists of a tune per character – *Colonel Bogey* for Colonel Mustard, *Onward Christian Soldiers* for Rev. Green. Otherwise there is little of note, except the curious comment in the instructions that 'The program does appear to pause while producing sounds'. Either it does pause, or it doesn't.

Cluedo may not be the classiest program ever written. But it hardly seems to matter. You'll buy it if you want to play the hugely succesful game on your Amstrad, and you'll be able to play a proper game even if there are no other humans around.

PC

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

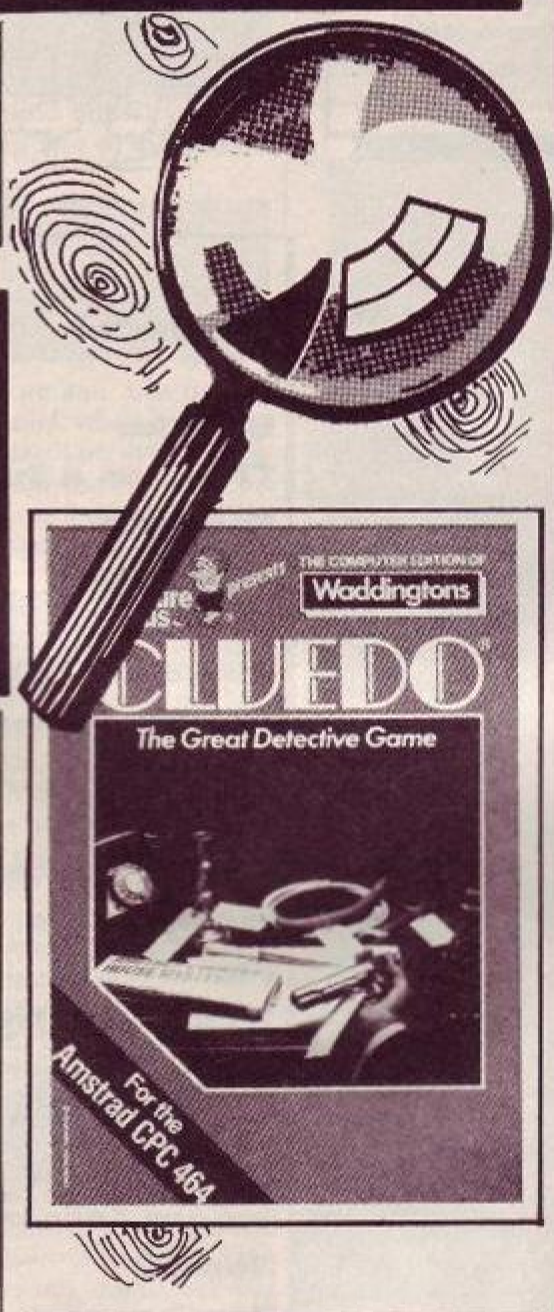
Pretty good – all that's missing are the red blobs on the characters' cheeks.

PC

THIRD OPINION

The use of colour is a bit poor, but otherwise the game translates very well. As usual, if you didn't like the board game you probably won't like this either – and even if you did, the little tunes are infuriating. Whodunnit fans will just have to turn the sound down, I suppose.

AW



GOOD NEWS

▶ **No need for other humans**

BAD NEWS

▶ **Poor graphics**

GRAPHICS	30%
SONICS	39%
GRAB FACTOR	46%
STAYING POWER	59%
A A RATING	52%

BATMAN

Ocean, £8.95 cass, joystick or keys

If you look at all the licensing deals Ocean have done this must have been a contender for the one most likely to produce a turkey of a game. In fact it is one of the most attractive, addictive, humourous and long lasting games that a licensing deal has produced. All achieved without six months advertising hype of the character involved.

There's no Gotham City or *KRUNCH!!, KAPOW!*?£!, THWOK*£?!'£!!* fights, just a single caped crusader in search of the seven pieces of the Batmobile that will allow him to rescue his kidnapped sidekick Robin. Batman appears by sliding down the Batpole into the Batcave, which consists of over 150 locations drawn in marvellous 3D, colour and detail. Ultimate fans will probably scream "rip-off" again but they couldn't be further from the truth. The improvement in colour, screen design and most importantly the puzzling involved make this something really special.

SECOND OPINION

A superb arcade adventure with just about everything you could want except shooting. And, if I remember right, that was never Batman's style. Style is what this program has got a lot of: it's a joy to watch and great fun to play.

PC

Batman's first task is to find four pieces of equipment which he will need to get him through his quest. Jet Batboots allow him to jump, while the Batthruster and Batbelt enhance this control. The Batbag allows him to pick an object up and move it about. As well as this Batman can push objects around, jump on them and even pick up and jump in the same move.

Once he's got the equipment he has the necessary skills to get the seven car parts. Sometimes you'll find that hard to believe though because the puzzles and screens are so wickedly devious and full of surprises. Extra help and powers are given along the way though in the form of Batpills that give Batman super speed, invulnerability or super jumping power, each for a short period of time. These look like little Batmen and are very handy in certain difficult sections.

Movement between rooms can be achieved in several ways: through doors, just by walking off the edge of the visible floor, by going off the top of the screen and by falling through the floor. When in a room other things may move Batty around – conveyor belts, moving blocks, lifts, slippery floors, disappearing blocks and helpful droids. Which does what and where has to be discovered by trial and error: just expect the unexpected and the most difficult.

Nearly all the rooms have a purpose to them as an obstacle to be overcome, a skill to be learnt or an object to be picked up. There is a massive variety of rooms which will keep you puzzling and the wall, carpet and scenery designs are extremely impre-

Bat Control

Once Batman has the boots, thruster and belt his control is considerably enhanced. The thruster gives him some horizontal drift so that he can actually manoeuvre in the air as he falls. While he's doing this his cape fills out with air, as all good carbon-reinforced parachute Batcloaks should do – a lovely touch.

The low gravity Batbelt gives even more control since it slows down the rate of descent, making Batman highly responsive to in-flight control. This means that when taking off from high perches or dropping through floors he can drift leisurely around looking for a good landing spot.



One of the most impressive screens in the game and one of the hardest to get to

ssive. They can also be deadly though because all sorts of nasty monsters, spiked floors and killer objects will appear to make life difficult.

Batman starts with eight lives but bonus lives can be found and occasionally the game gives you an extra 'dog's life' just when you thought it was finished. Another nice touch is the reincarnation stones that when picked up will allow you to return to that point after you have lost all your lives and try again. This only happens once for each stone but it means games can be run together so that the amount of exploring you can do is increased.

THIRD OPINION

Not much like the DC comic strip, but an awful lot like the TV series – this game is very witty and totally absurd. It's also ingenious, wickedly difficult and graphically miraculous – it's got everything. Except Commissioner Gordon, that is. Oh, and then there's the batphone, and the bat shark-repellent, and...

AW

At first sight the game seems fairly ordinary but as you start getting into it and collect all four pieces of equipment it really opens out into a challenge of great style and interest. The graphics are superb with some of the best detailed, multicolour rooms I've seen. The sound is the only annoying thing though with a nauseating version of the theme tune. But a rhythmic tapping accompanies Batman's walking action and this is much nicer on the ears. Ocean's best yet – never mind the hype, here's the quality.

BW





More of the delightful scenery puzzles

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

All the objects are clear enough – but you really need colour to appreciate this game.

PC

GOOD NEWS

- **Over 150 locations.**
- **Beautifully designed screens with lots of variety.**
- **Really wicked puzzles to solve.**
- **Plenty of joystick as well as mental action.**
- **Lots of nice touches and humour.**

BAD NEWS

- **Games like *Rambo* get all the hype and not this one.**

GRAPHICS	93%
SONICS	67%
GRAB FACTOR	84%
STAYING POWER	96%
A A RATING	93%



THING ON A SPRING

Gremlin Graphics, £8.95 cass, £12.95 disk, joystick or keys

Lovely title for a real cutey of a game that features one of the most lovable computer characters yet. He's called Thing and as you might guess he gets about by bouncing everywhere on his springy body. He's battling against the evil toy goblin in order to destroy his reign of power.

To beat the goblin Thing has to collect nine pieces of jigsaw that will provide the key to victory. The nine pieces are spread across four levels of a toy factory, each level being composed of a number of screens and connecting tubes. Most of the rooms are in fact more than one screen long and as Thing makes his way along the screen scrolls smoothly with him. This though is where the game's major fault occurs with the edge of the screen breaking up badly during the scroll.

SECOND OPINION

Cutesy indeed. It's apparently vey easy, but I found it difficult to get off the first screen. But I wasn't deterred – this is a very addictive game indeed. Shame about the flicker – I suspect it's something to do with frame-flyback. But you can't have everything, can you?

PC

The rooms are connected by tubes in which Thing can take a well-earned rest from the nightmare tasks that face him. At the left hand end of the factory is a lift which Thing can use to get to any of the four floors. However, to get to all of the rooms and all the jigsaw pieces Thing will need to collect five other objects that will give him special powers.

The rooms are full of platform game type obstacles and monsters that are Thing's major difficulties in his quest. The monsters all move in set patterns around the screen but their speed and type varies every time you enter a room. They can be avoided with good timing and judicious use of Thing's jumping abilities. These are his most entertaining feature. When Thing is hit by a nasty it depletes his supply of oil. This is what stops his spring from rusting up. If he runs out the game ends but top ups can be grabbed from oilcans left lying around.

When walking Thing just hops along but pressing fire will launch him somersaulting through the air and bounce him off any obstacles he encounters. He can also build himself up for a vertical jump by compressing the spring and releasing it to rocket skywards. This is a great control mode and you'll have endless fun bouncing around.

The five objects that give Thing abilities are gift wrapped boxes and amongst their bestowed skills are the ability to use escalators and rocket buttons. These buttons are great because when Thing treads on one he is shot up into the air till he hits an obstruction and then zips horizontally until he hits another obstruction and drops to the ground.

THIRD OPINION

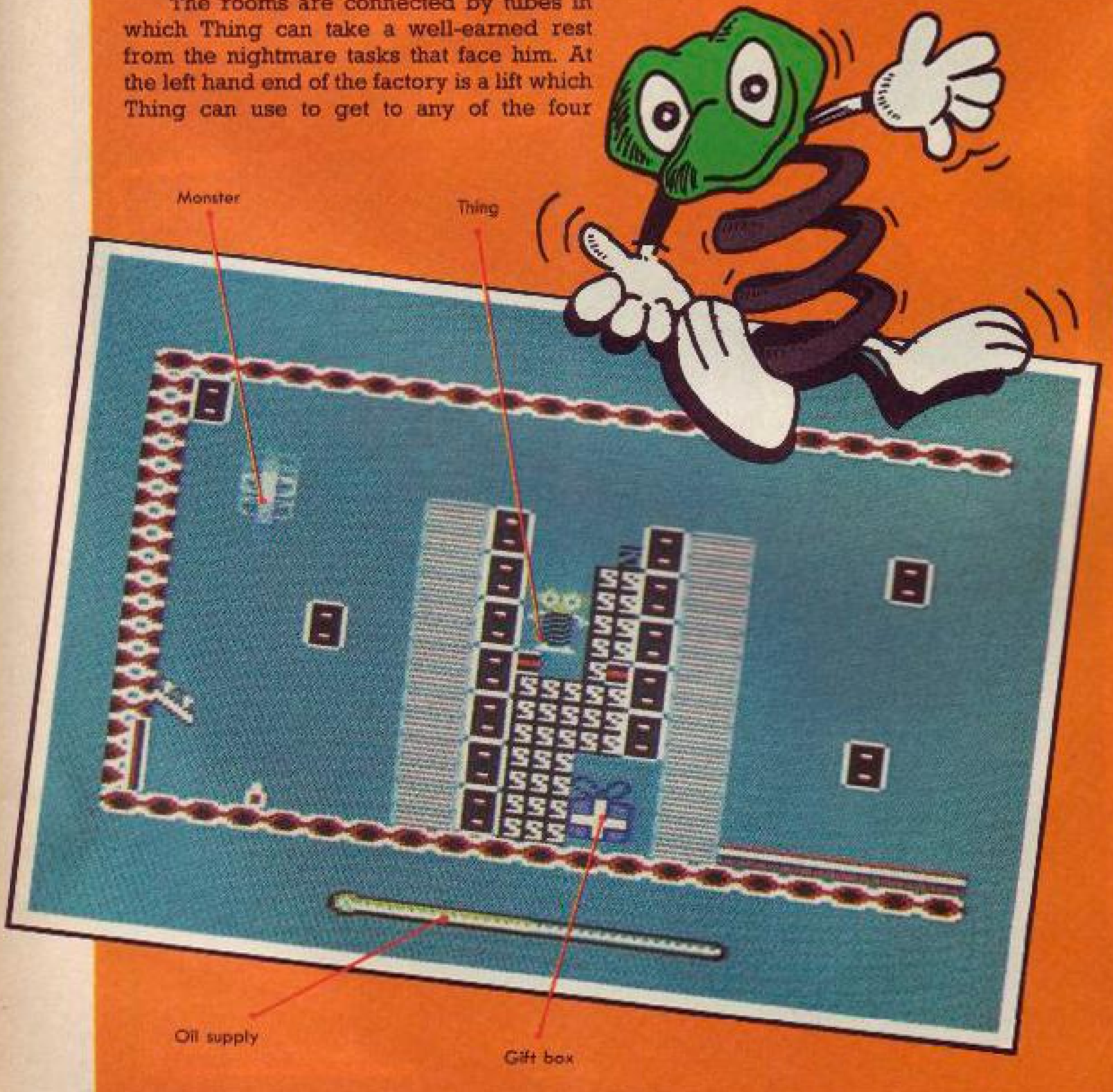
If you like big, bright graphics, bizarre controls and all things cute, buy this game. Personally, I hate cuteness in all its many forms – but the gameplay is so good I can just about put up with them.

AW

There are many other features that may help or hinder inside rooms – trampolines, slides and disappearing blocks. All the monsters, objects and scenery are nicely drawn with plenty of colour and interesting design. That gives you plenty to see and do on most screens. The sound is another nice feature of the game with a catchy beat that will have you tapping your foot throughout the game.

Once you've started playing its very hard to stop because Thing has such nice control and his cute persona is what makes the game special. The action is easy to get into but pretty tough to solve so many happy hours will be spent with it. The only real drawback is with the graphics. The flicker on the scrolling isn't always very noticeable but may still prove offputting while the main character is also prone to some flicker but to a lesser extent. Some great fun that will test your skill as well.

BW



GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Perfectly clear – but the game loses a lot without colour.

PC

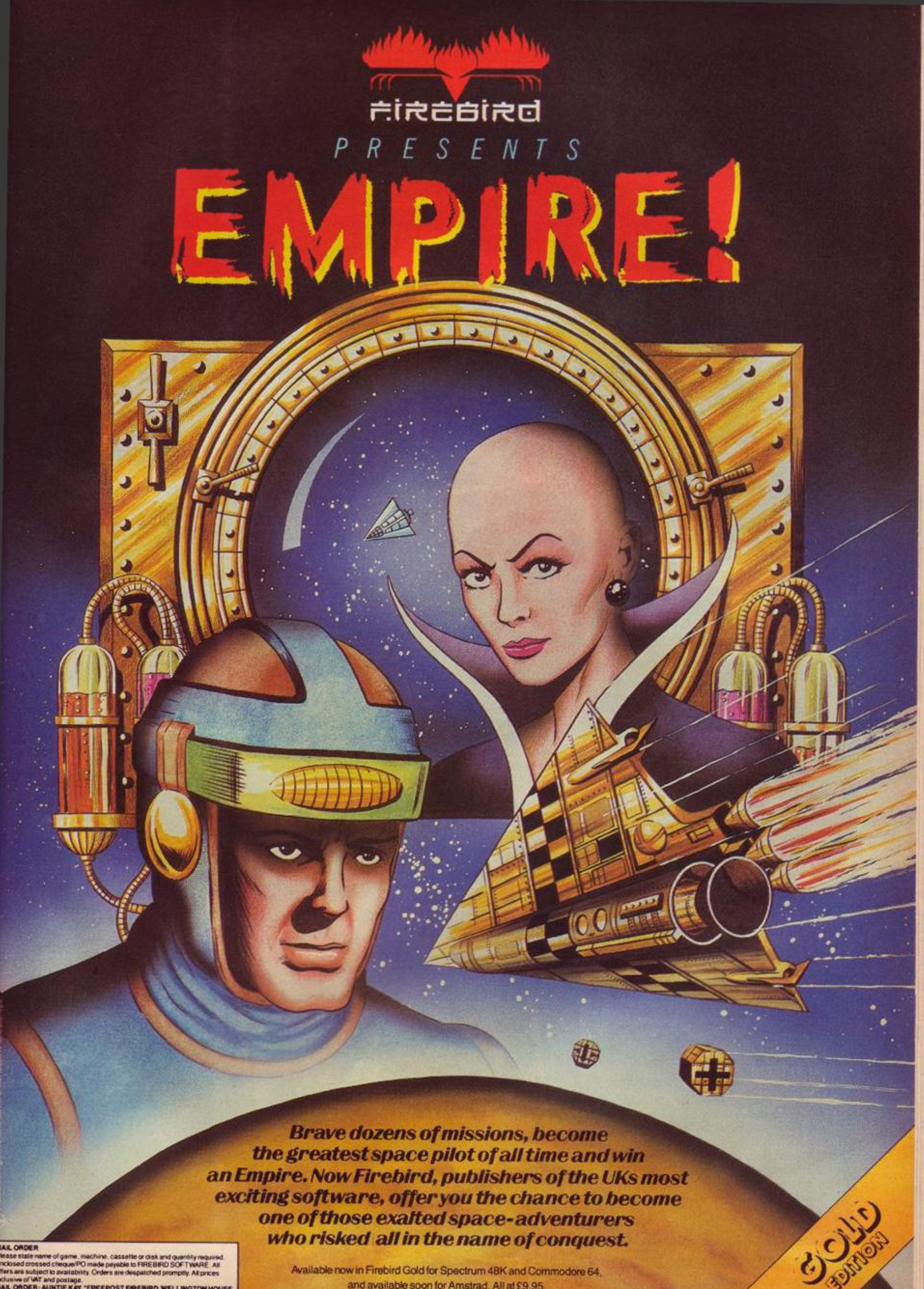
GOOD NEWS

- **The cutest character ever.**
- **Great character control.**
- **Nicely designed screens that scroll smoothly.**
- **Easy to get into.**
- **Tough enough to keep you going for some while.**

BAD NEWS

- **Shame about the screen edge on scrolling and character flicker.**

GRAPHICS	72%
SONICS	82%
GRAB FACTOR	84%
STAYING POWER	78%
A A RATING	82%


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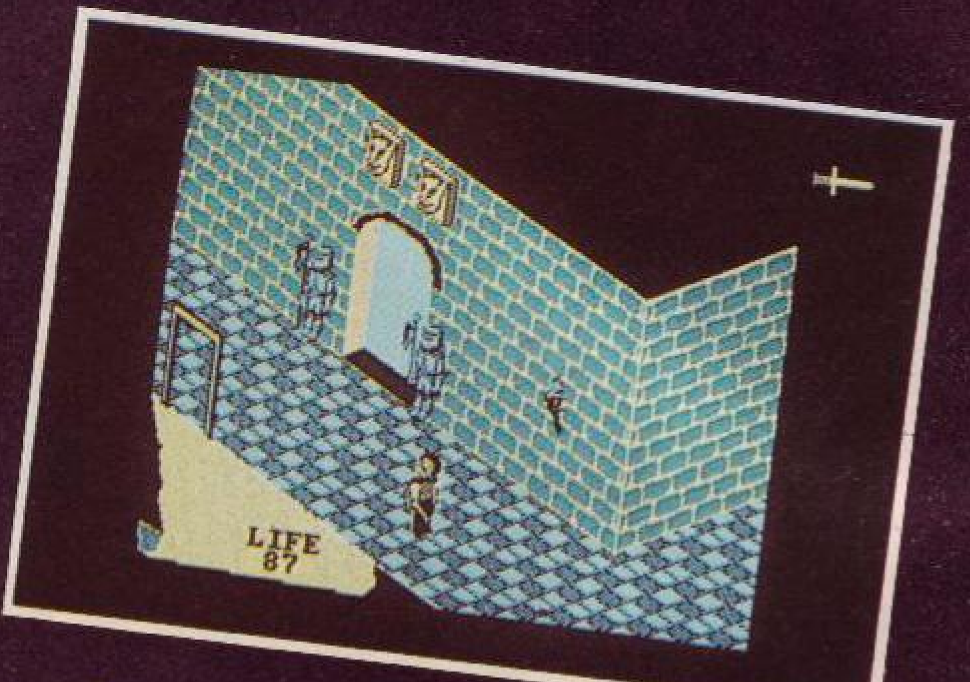


FAIRLIGHT

The Edge, £9.95 cass, £14.95 disk, joystick or keys

There's a positive wealth of excellent arcade adventures around this month with not only *Get Dexter* and *Batman* to puzzle over but this conversion from The Edge. It's in the same sort of 3D mould but there are plenty of original elements and puzzles to keep you guessing.

The game is set in a castle infested with guards and other supernatural defences that try to prevent the hero, Isvar, from achieving his quest. That quest is to find the "Book of Light" and release a sorceror from his imprisonment in the tower of the castle so that he can in turn free you from the castle. You aren't told much more than that – just the controls and a few objects that you may encounter. The rest has to be worked out for yourself.



Isvar tries to fathom the mysteries of this magical castle

SECOND OPINION

In another month, without games like Batman *and* Get Dexter, *this would have seemed a truly excellent game. This month, it comes across as just very, very good indeed. Isvar is an engaging fellow, even if he does beging to sound like a horse as he trundles around the castle. There's a good variety of oppponents and puzzles, so you won't be disappointed if you like a good 3D arcade adventure.*

PC

Isvar appears in an open courtyard where you get first sight of the scenery that appears in most of the game. The stone walls rise very high in the background with a patterned floor which varies in different locations. Sometimes it is stone, wooden or patterned with an appropriate walking sound for the different surfaces. Large wooden doors and other sorts of opening connect between locations and walking off the edge of a screen may also reveal another section.

THIRD OPINION

An arcade adventure with the emphasis definitely on the adventure side, this game does not suffer just from the comparison with the other glittering releases this month – it also suffers from being a Spectrum conversion. The sad fact is, the colour looks like an afterthought. The puzzling is where the real interest lies, however, and this is just superb.

AW

In some areas there are many objects and pieces of furniture lying around. Some of these can be picked up and used, others moved about to get at things. Isvar can carry up to five objects, although heavy objects like a barrel can only be carried on their own or with something light. There is fairly free use of objects allowing you to carry them between rooms, stack them up, jump on them and push them about.

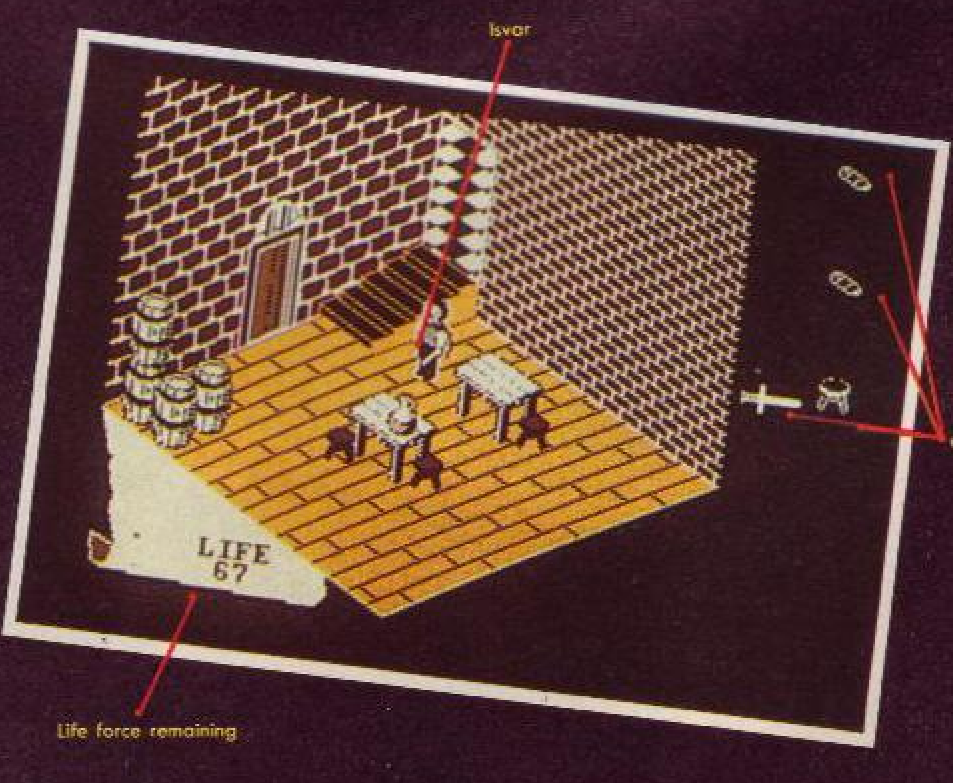
Pushing can be quite important because when Isvar collides with a static object it will give it some inertia so that, depending on its weight, it will slide away from him. Particularly light obects may skid away from him, perhaps to be lost underneath a table or other surface. This means you have to be particularly careful in moving things around and picking them up.

As Isvar explores the castle he has to try to preserve his life force. This counts down every time he bumps into one of the castle's defenders and ends the game if it reaches zero. It can be replenished by finding the right objects and using them. Decanters, bread and chicken pieces can all increase the life force by 10 points but need to be used sparingly because they don't reappear.

Isvar's main weapon is a sword with which he can hack away at anything in front of him. This won't work on all the enemies in the castle, though, and even while he is attacking them his precious life force will be going down.

Solving the game will take a long while but there's plenty to explore and investigate along the way. The graphics are detailed but lacking a little in colour and variety. There isn't a great deal of animation but there are some nice monsters and locations with plenty in.

BW



G O O D   N E W S

- ▶ **Detailed and atmospheric castle graphics.**
- ▶ **Good object manipulation.**
- ▶ **Testing puzzles give the game depth.**
- ▶ **Good combination of fighting and brainwork.**

B A D   N E W S

- ▶ **Lack of colour and variety makes it look a little drab.**

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Not bad at all – you can see your way around without difficulty.

PC

GRAPHICS	73%
SONICS	68%
GRAB FACTOR	77%
STAYING POWER	83%
A A RATING	81%

Monster munch

The various monsters in the castle have different characteristics and can be dealt with in different ways.

GUARDS: these patrol in patterns until Isvar comes too close, when they attack him. They can be killed with his sword, leaving a helmet which also harms life force when bumped into.

TROLLS: these can also be dealt with using the sword and can be stopped from reappearing if you drop the right object on their grave.

WRAITHS: very hazardous to Isvar's health since a sword is no use against them. Something else will make them disappear though.

SPHERES: these deplete large chunks of life force – avoid them.

PLANTS: nasty things that strike at you – avoid them at all costs because they are deadly.

WHIRLWINDS: destroy objects left lying around which can be used to your advantage. Drain life force as well.

FA CUP FOOTBALL

Virgin, £7.95 cass, keys only

The end of the league season is fast approaching and cup fever builds in the run up to Wembley. If your team hasn't made it all the way you've got another chance to steer them to success yourself in this strategy game simulating the real thing.

Up to eight players can take part and each one controls 10 teams in their battle for glory. You can choose from all 92 league clubs and 32 non-league clubs or even add a team of your own. Once all players have been chosen you can opt to start from the first or third rounds with the draw being made very slowly, presumably to build up the tension for each team.

SECOND OPINION

This is one for the really dedicated micro-football fan. It's long-winded and far from spectacular , and doesn't really give you the feeling that the minnows have got a chance. It may be realistic, but surely we want to feel that Rochdale might make it to the FA cup Final?

PC

A tactic has to be chosen for each team from a selection of three. These are simply defensive, balanced and attacking options that determine the general performance of the team. For the first three rounds that first decision determines how the team plays for the whole 90 minutes but in later rounds you get to make more changes. You can watch the scores change as the minutes tick away (not real time) or speed through for the final scores.

If a tie is drawn a replay takes place with the home and away teams reversed. The only other option is for the away team to have a newsflash that may help or harm the team's morale. Some of these newsflashes are serious, others are downright ridiculous but will make you laugh. Once all the replays are out of the way the draw for the next round is made at the usual snail's pace.

THIRD OPINION

Very, very boring. OK, I'm not a soccer fan, but if I were this would probably put me off.

AW

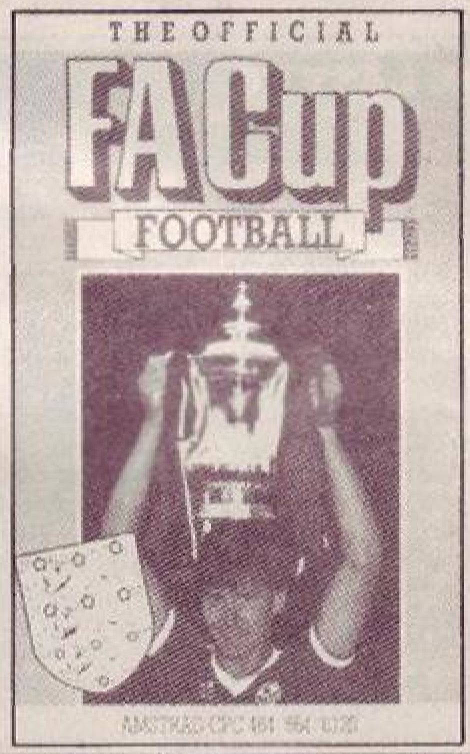
In the fourth round there is a break at half time in which you can change the team's playing tactic in the light of the first half score to try to swing the result your way. By the sixth round this is expanded still further for tactic changes in the middle of both halves, the last of which includes the option to bring on a substitute to revive flagging fortunes.

Even if your teams get knocked out the game will carry on to the final where a small picture of Wembley appears, accompanied by a rendition of "Land of hope and glory". The match is played with one line reports on significant action until the cup winner is declared. If your favourite team gets knocked out though you can reset the game at any time and go through it all again.

In the later rounds you are also given multiple choice questions to answer to determine your managerial skill. If you get them right (you aren't told if you have) it will slightly improve the team's chance of success. After a few times the same old questions pop up though and you won't be any the wiser as to which is definitely the right answer.

Realism is the whole problem with the game – it's too realistic. The big first division clubs always get the furthest with an underdog only very occasionally getting a look in. What everybody really wants is to take a lowly team all the way through playing skill and not be burdened with real life form which spoils all the fun. This isn't possible because there isn't enough for the player to do or control.

BW



G O O D   N E W S

- ▶ **Realistic simulation.**
- ▶ **Fun watching your own team progress.**

B A D   N E W S

- ▶ **Not enough strategy decisions.**
- ▶ **Draw is very slow.**
- ▶ **Too realistic, the underdog has virtually no chance.**

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Fine, if you really want to play the game.

AW

GRAPHICS	26%
SONICS	21%
GRAB FACTOR	53%
STAYING POWER	36%
A A RATING	41%

MOON CRESTA

Incentive, £7.95 cass, £12.95 disk, joystick or keys

This is a conversion of a now ancient arcade game that inhabited pubs and leisure centres in the days of *Space Invaders* and *Galaxians*. Incentive obviously have a penchant for nostalgia but I'm sure many other people will enjoy what is a good old fashioned blast demanding great reactions and no brainwork.

There are nine basic waves in the game with a possible two intermediate stages, all of which repeat at a faster rate if you get through them once. The spaceship you control comes in three stages which form your three lives. The first stage has a single laser turret, the other two are larger and have two lasers. These are single shot, though, so that you can't get alien-murdering rapid fire.

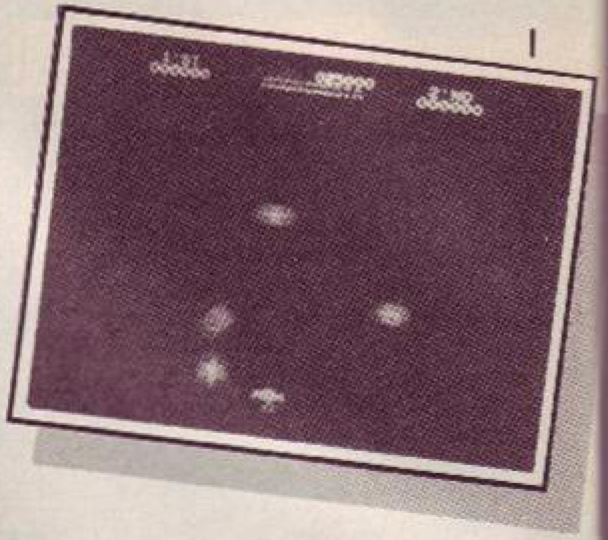
The first two waves are circular objects that move down the screen in a figure-of-eight pattern. When shot they produce a half circle which follows a similar movement pattern. Waves three and four are a particularly nasty breed of insect that make life very tough indeed at the start of the wave.

SECOND OPINION

Yes, I enjoyed this as far as it went. A good blast is very therapeutic in the middle of a hard day. It won't ask much of your brain cells, but theat can be considered an advantage.

PC

At the end of the fourth wave a bonus section apears, if you have two sections remaining, where they have to be docked



Watch those aliens blur – no pause mode!

THE LAST V8

Mastertronic Added Dimension, £2.99 cass, joystick or keys

Nothing to do with doodlebugs or secret weapons but a souped up car that along with its scientist owner has survived a global holocaust in an underground bunker. The car now has radiation shielding, a telemodem link to base and a top speed of 200 kph. You've ventured out onto the surface of the planet but are threatened by a delayed attack nuclear warhead.

What all that means is that you've got to get your car back to the safety of the bunker before the bomb blows or the car's radiation shield decays. The journey to the base is broken up into two stages, one out in the open countryside and the other on the inner city road system. The first stage has to be completed within a time limit which you won't find easy to beat.

The car begins on a tarmacced road in the middle of some picturesquely green scenery. The way behind it is blocked and the route you have to take is obvious. The car accelerates in the direction that it is moved and it will take a while to get a hang of this control because of the inertia and skilful steering required.

SECOND OPINION

As a steer-em-up this is pretty good. but that's all the games is – a matter of keeping your car on the road. It requires a lot of skill and induces large amounts of frustration as you go back to the start each time you crash.

PC

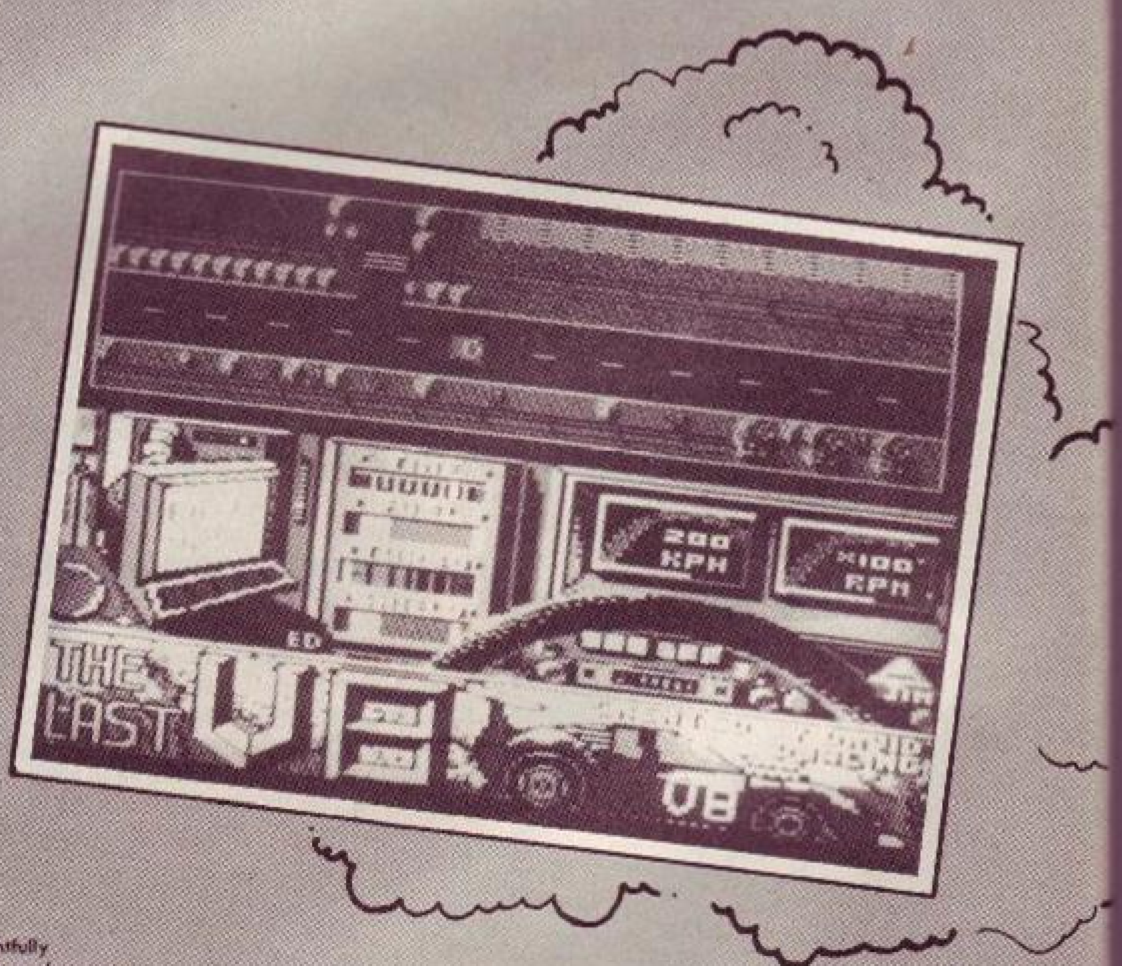
The car has to be kept on the road or just clipping the grass verge but any sort of contact with trees, buildings, hedges or fences will crash it and send you back to the start. The initial route is fairly straight and can be negotiated at top speed but you soon enter some twisting, turning road that forces the car to slow down or crash. The route is fairly obvious with only a couple of blind turnings that you'll soon learn to avoid.

THIRD OPINION

Great – as far as it goes. Unfortunately, it lacks the depth and variety needed to give it real staying power. A near miss.

AW

The second stage is in the maze like environment of the city where the problem is one of finding the base as well as avoiding radiation damage. This is where the shield and distance-to-base gauges come in handy, allowing you to home in on the base and to know how close you are to death. All the turns in the city are at right angles and the thing to watch for are radiation areas that you want to pass through as quickly as possible.



A delightfully scrolling roadway on your way to the underground base

together. This will earn you a bonus based on how fast you managed it and increase the firepower on subsequent waves. If all three sections remain you can dock them together at a later stage to form the whole ship. After completing the nine waves this is broken up again leaving you to battle through in the same manner.

THIRD OPINION

Bright, colourful and challenging at first. But the excitement soon palls, leaving you with just another old-fashioned shoot-em-up.

AW

Waves five and six are aliens who whizz about the screen appearing intermittently for you to blast at. Wave seven has to be anticipated because two large fireballs come hammering diagonally into the middle of the screen catching the unprepared in a deadly sandwich. Waves eight and nine are equally devious with aliens who appear to dodge harmlessly about at the top of the screen but suddenly dive straight down the screen hoping to impale a luckless player.



The graphics are nicely done with a superb title screen, although the collision detection does leave a little to be desired. Sound is minimal but then what do you expect from an arcade conversion except "peoww-peoww-peoww" and the odd ditty? The most annoying features are the interludes that slow the whole game down and the fact that you can't reset it quickly to start again. A nice nostalgic blast but probably won't interest you for too long.

BW

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

It's pretty murky without the colours, and pretty hard to make out your ship.

PC

G O O D N E W S

► **Colourful, fast moving graphics.**
► **A very tough shoot-em-up in which the alien patterns aren't easily beaten.**
► **One of the best left, right and fire games around needing good reactions.**

B A D N E W S

► **Very unoriginal and ageing game idea.**
► **Infuriating pauses in the action.**
► **Probably won't hold your interest for long.**

GRAPHICS	70%	
SONICS	41%	
GRAB FACTOR	70%	
STAYING POWER	53%	
A A RATING	62%	

The intrument panel at the bottom of the screen is beautifully drawn to show the dashboard of the car. It shows speed, fuel, time left, turbo, rpm, shield and distance to base. Most of these aren't needed at all until the second stage.

Both stages feature smooth multi-directional scrolling and although this display is only half the screen it has some excellent detail on it. The control and time limit may seem unduly harsh at first but they'll act as quite an incentive to get further and better. A nice package that just lacks a little depth.

BW

G O O D N E W S

► **Excellently detailed screen display.**
► **Smooth multi directional scrolling.**
► **Great music throughout the game.**
► **Difficult to complete.**

B A D N E W S

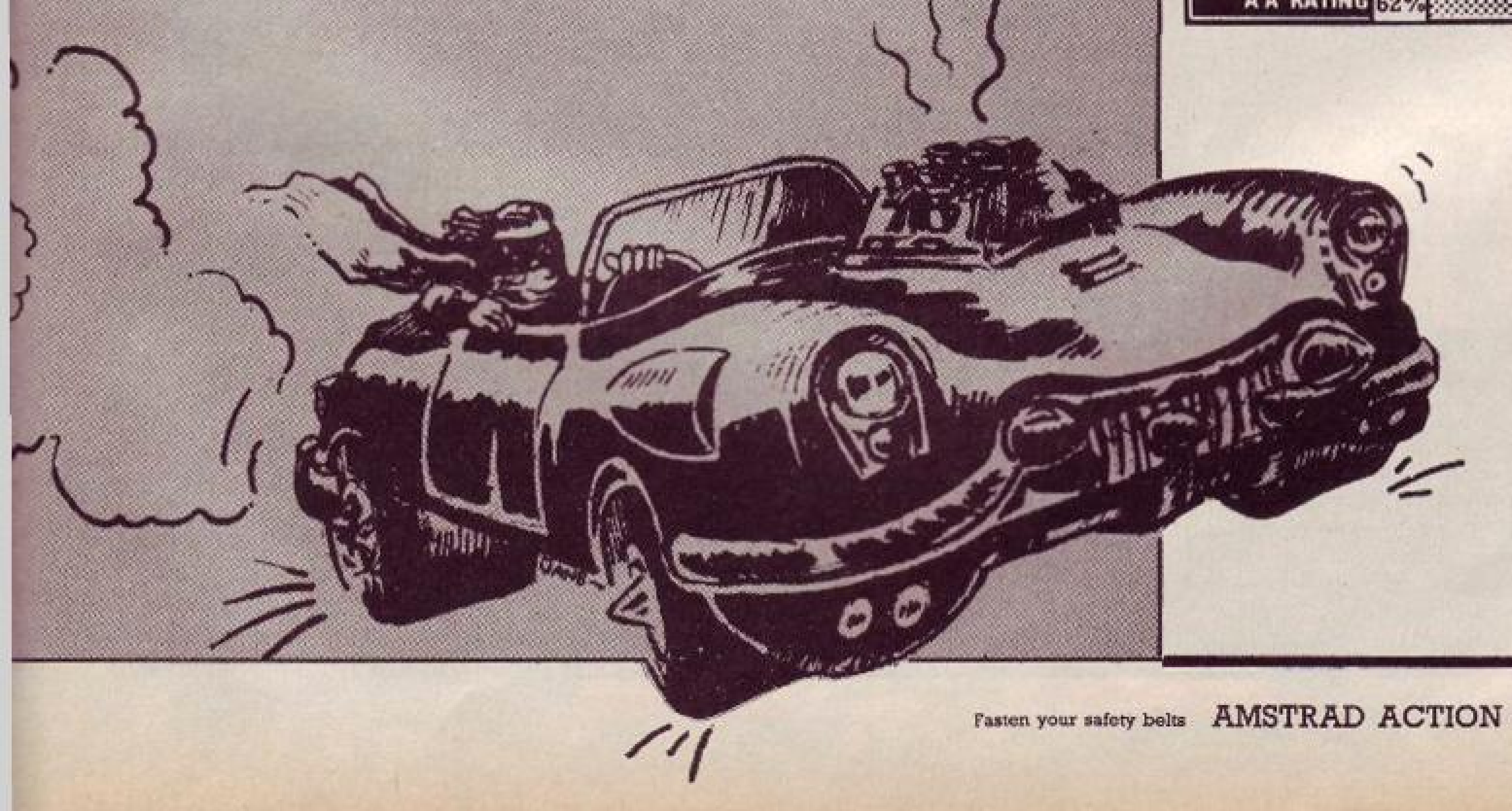
► **May be too tough to control.**
► **Lacks depth and can become reptitive.**

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Pretty muddy – very hard to see your vehicle. But it's still playable.

AW

GRAPHICS	86%	
SONICS	82%	
GRAB FACTOR	76%	
STAYING POWER	67%	
A A RATING	74%	



THE WAY OF THE TIGER

Gremlin Graphics, £9.95 cass, £14.95 disk, joystick or keys

This is another in the long line of combat games where two opponents beat each other senseless. The difference with this one is that not only can you use your hands and feet but there are sections where you fight with poles and swords as well. The action is a quest by a Ninja warrior against evil in which he will have to overcome massive odds.

The three different types of combat load in three sections and these can be tackled in practice form or strung together to make the whole game. The unarmed combat is the first of these and features the most impressive action. It's set on a scrolling backdrop of mountains with two other independently scrolling areas in the foreground. This technique has been called "trigeminal" scrolling and it creates an interesting perspective effect as the Ninja moves around.

SECOND OPINION

This is the kind of game that grabs you immediately but doesn't have the power to keep its grip. Excellent graphics and animation, the only 'trigeminal' scrolling I've ever seen, and some nasty-looking opponents don't quite compensate for the slightly repetitive gameplay.

PC

The display will also move up and down as the combatants leap up and down, making the display a very attractive one indeed. The animation is also pretty special, every fighting move smoothly made. The kicks and punches slam home with satisfying effect as the opponent's head reels back, he doubles up or collpases to the floor. The aim is of course to destroy your opponent completely.

There are two dials that indicate endurance and inner force for each fighter. Endurance falls quickly with each blow received and as it falls it also gradually reduces the inner force. When this reaches zero the character will keel over or simply break up into thin air. As soon as one of your opponents is vanquished though another more fearsome one materialises to challenge.

THIRD OPINION

As one stage of a game, the combat would really be very good. As the entire game, it just doesn't have the lasting interest.

AW

Early oppon nts, such as the dagger-wielding goblin and the fellow Ninja, don't have much inner force and are easily beaten. But later opponents like the rhino-headed, armoured beast and the giant troll are much tougher. The troll is an enormous beast who makes the whole screen shake as he walks and packs a punch like Frank Bruno.

When playing the whole game success against all the unarmed combat opponents will prompt the game to laod the pole fighting. This takes place on a single screen but which is also well done. The fights take place on a log over a river and victory plunges the enemy into the water. There aren't so many battles here but it does feature a superbly animated skeleton.

Completing the pole fighting takes you onto the final challenge, the sword fighting. This is against yet another detailed background but has moving people and carts behind you and a bird who flies beautifully across screen. Here the fighting gets really tough though and defeating all the adversaries to complete the game will not be easy.

The scrolling, background graphics and animation are superb but where the game falls down slightly is on the gameplay. It is just combat action, which has been done before, and most opponents can be defeated by merely repeating a particular manoeuvre. There are about 10 actions possible but these don't change in essence in the three sections, so that there isn't a great deal of variety in the action.

BW

G O O D   N E W S

- **Trigeminal scrolling is lovely to watch.**
- **Graphics and animation are excellent.**
- **Opponents are varied and tough.**

B A D   N E W S

- **Gameplay is repetitive even with different weapons.**
- **Loading sections is time consuming.**

GRAPHICS	89%
SONICS	37%
GRAB FACTOR	76%
STAYING POWER	65%
A A RATING	70%

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Looks quite good in mono – but then the foreground was only two colour anyway.

AW





If we had moving screenshots you could see the trigeminal scrolling



THE COLLECTION

WARGAMERS SERIES

The PSS WARGAMERS SERIES has been created to combine elements of a strategy game like chess with the added excitement of a graphic arcade game. They are for the player who wants a serious but stimulating game requiring both manual dexterity and mental agility. The strategic level of the games is played on a map system, whilst the tactical can be played in an optional arcade style with you actually firing guns and missiles.

THEATRE EUROPE – STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR 1985 – CRASH/ ZZAP/AMTIX.

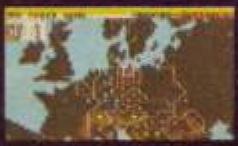
Theatre Europe portrays the next war in Europe. Command either NATO or the WARSAW PACT forces and control air/ ground/nuclear and chemical units. Optional arcade sequences put you actually in the hot seat. 3 Level game where Level 1 is for beginners (the computer opponent will not use the Nuclear option). Level 2 is a "rational" game following the accepted strategies of NATO and the WARSAW PACT. In level 3 the computer plays a highly unpredictable game where anything can happen.

"THE ATMOSPHERE GENERATED BY THIS EXCELLENT GAME IS INCREDIBLE – VIRTUALLY UNRIVALLED BY ANYTHING ELSE AVAILABLE" ZZAP 64 JUNE '85 – GOLD MEDAL AWARD.

"HEAD AND SHOULDERS ABOVE ALL OTHER WARGAMES – A POWERFUL LESSON" CCI JULY '85.







"IT MAKES YOU THINK MORE THAN MOST GAMES" – AA RAVE – AMSTRAD ACTION FEB '86.

A C At (S avail soon) £9.95

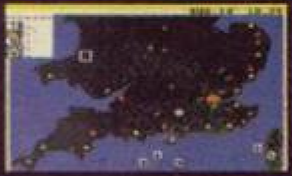
BATTLE OF BRITAIN

A 3 level game with you in control of fighter command during the summer of 1940. Optional arcade sequences include flying a Spitfire in aerial combat and firing an anti aircraft gun in ground to air fighting.



"ONE OF THE MOST PLAYABLE WARGAMES EVER" COMPUTER GAMER DEC '85
GO AND BUY IT!" – AMTIX DEC '85
"SUPERB!" – ZZAP 64 XMAS '85

A C (S avail soon) £9.95



BATTLE FOR MIDWAY

You are in command of the US Pacific fleets 6 months after the attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbour. It is a 3 level game depicting 3 different Japanese strategies.



"COMMENDED – STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR 1984 – C & VG
"ONE OF THE MOST AMBITIOUS WARGAMES EVER RELEASED" ZZAP 64 DEC '85

A C S M £9.95



MIDAS







MIDAS – The Midas series of role playing real time graphic adventures are totally expandable. Not only do you have stunning 3D fully animated graphics, real time interactive conflict and conversation sequences, but you can transfer your player character into different scenarios from the Midas range. A series of expansion modules are also planned to add new opponents, larger scenarios and different quests to increase indefinitely the playing life of each game written with MIDAS.

SWORDS & SORCERY – represents the first example of the Midas range. As with all role playing adventures, the aim of the game is to develop your character – you might want to become an expert swordsman, or perhaps a cunning thief – all things are possible with Swords & Sorcery. There are also quests within quests for those who want to follow them – some are given, others must be found – some are lost causes – the choice is yours!

Although possibly the most complex program yet attempted on a home micro, the controls are simplicity itself. Just six keys will control your progress around the dungeon and operate the menu system for all your other commands.

"GAME CONCEPT OF THE YEAR 1985" CRASH/ZZAP 64/AMTIX "GAME OF THE MONTH" – C & VG JAN '86

"CRASH SMASH" – JAN '86

"SWORDS & SORCERY REPRESENTS THE MOST SOPHISTICATED D + D TYPE GAME YET SEEN ON A HOME MICRO" COMPUTER GAMER – GAME OF THE MONTH – DEC '85

S A (C avail soon) £9.95

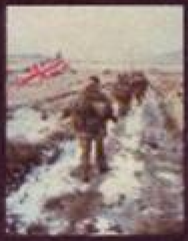
Strategic WARGAMES SERIES

THE STRATEGIC WARGAMES SERIES has been designed with the wargame "purist" in mind. The games are played on a map system, are "phased" and use symbolic representation of the units. Playability is the key note in the series with 5 levels of difficulty suitable for beginner and expert alike.

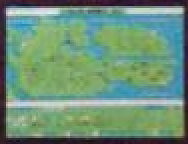
FALKLANDS '82

"A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF HOW WARGAMES SHOULD BE PRESENTED" CBM USER JAN '86
"FALKLANDS '82 WILL CHALLENGE AVID WARGAMERS FOR MONTHS" COMPUTER GAMER JAN '86 AS

S C (A avail soon) £7.95









IWO JIMA – NEW RELEASE

In the closing stages of WWII, the US Marines fought their costliest and toughest battle of the entire war – the capturing of the island of IWO JIMA. You command those forces whilst the computer controls the Japanese.

C (S avail soon) £7.95

A	=	AMSTRAD
S	=	SPECTRUM
C	=	CBM64
At	=	ATARI
M	=	MSX

MACADAM BUMPER

Pinball Wizards will love this game. Playing the table provided will provide hours of fun, but with Macadam Bumper you can design your own layout – from positioning flippers and bumpers right down to adjusting the Tilt sensitivity. The possibilities are endless!

"THIS IS THE PINBALL GAME IN EXCELSIS!" RAVE OF THE MONTH – YOUR SPECTRUM NOV '85.

"AN EXCELLENT PACKAGE" – 87% – CRASH SEPT '85

MACADAM BUMPER IS AN ERE INFORMATIQUE PRODUCT.

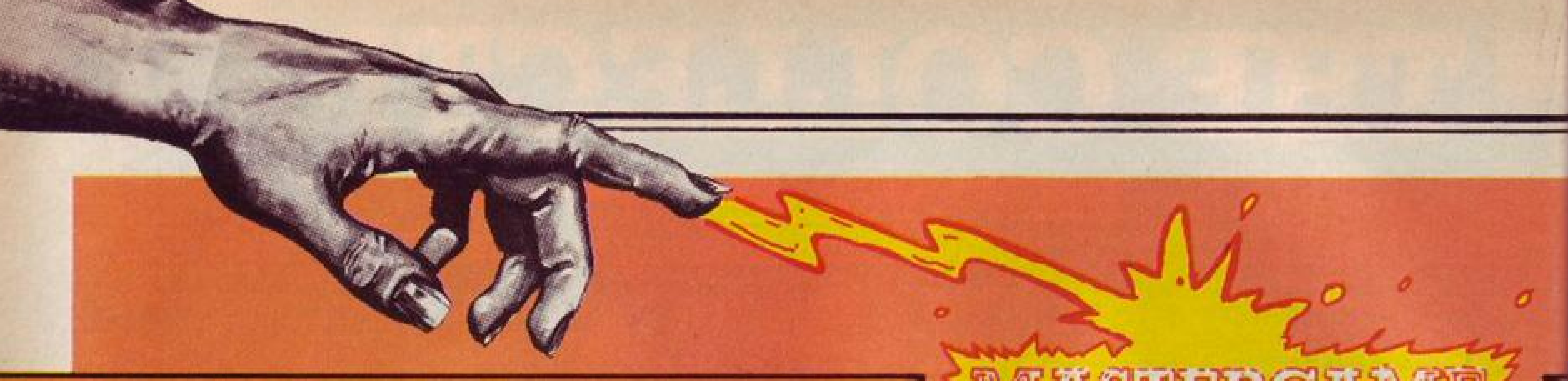
A S (C avail soon) £7.95



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CREDIT CARD ORDERS PHONE 0203 667556.



GET DEXTER (Crafton and Xunk)

PSS/Ere Informatique, £9.95 cass, £14.95 disk, joystick or keys

The French have arrived with a product so classy that many English software houses will have to sit up and take note. It's attractive, addictive, difficult, funny and with a host of special features that will stun and amaze you. It's an arcade adventure that will test your skills to the limit as you control an android in his search for the codes that will allow access to the computer controlling the galaxy.

Dexter the android, has to get the computer in order to save his colony, XUL 3, from an impending war on earth which would destroy both the computer and the colony. To get it he has to obtain a code composed of eight sections, each section being held by a professor. You have to find the professors, who are all in different rooms, and find how to extract the code from them.

The French Connection

At last it's happened – a European Mastergame. Amstrads (Schneiders) are the most popular computers in France and Germany and with such a demand it was inevitable that they start producing high quality software. We're now starting to see the first of that and it could just be the start of a cross channel avalanche of titles.

The US invasion has often been seen as a threat to the British software industry but with the traffic going mostly the other way with the European market it means we will tend to get just the cream of the crop. The industry should only benefit from that influx and the gamesplayers will certainly enjoy these new products.

The action takes place in 3D rooms that are so packed with colour and action that you'll wonder what all the fuss over Ultimate's Filmation technique on *Knight Lore* was for. The game is written using mode 0, which to you and me means up to 16 colours on screen at once. Normally this would mean blocky graphics but, as in *Sorcery*, so much work has been put in to them that they are detailed as well as colourful.

Dexter is well animated and, more important, quite speedy around the rooms. He makes his way between them via doorways and corridors. These are sometimes blocked by sliding doors which have to be opened using colour-coded key cards. Some doorways are located high on the wall and so movement is restricted both by the need for keys and the ability to actually reach doors.

By far the greatest hazards, though, are the various robotic and human occupants of the complex who will do their best to get in your way and drain Dexter's energy. The robot guards come in many different guises but are all drawn in shiny chrome and delightfully animated as they scuttle around the place. These can be killed using specific objects, different weapons dealing with particular types of robot.

The humans Dexter encounters come in three shapes – the professors, manic blonde lab assistants and the vicious, green-mohicanned punk who first appeared on the *Macadam Bumper* loading screen. The lab assistant and punk will chase Dexter and drain his energy but they can be beaten off by giving them the right object. The professor is a different challenge altogether.

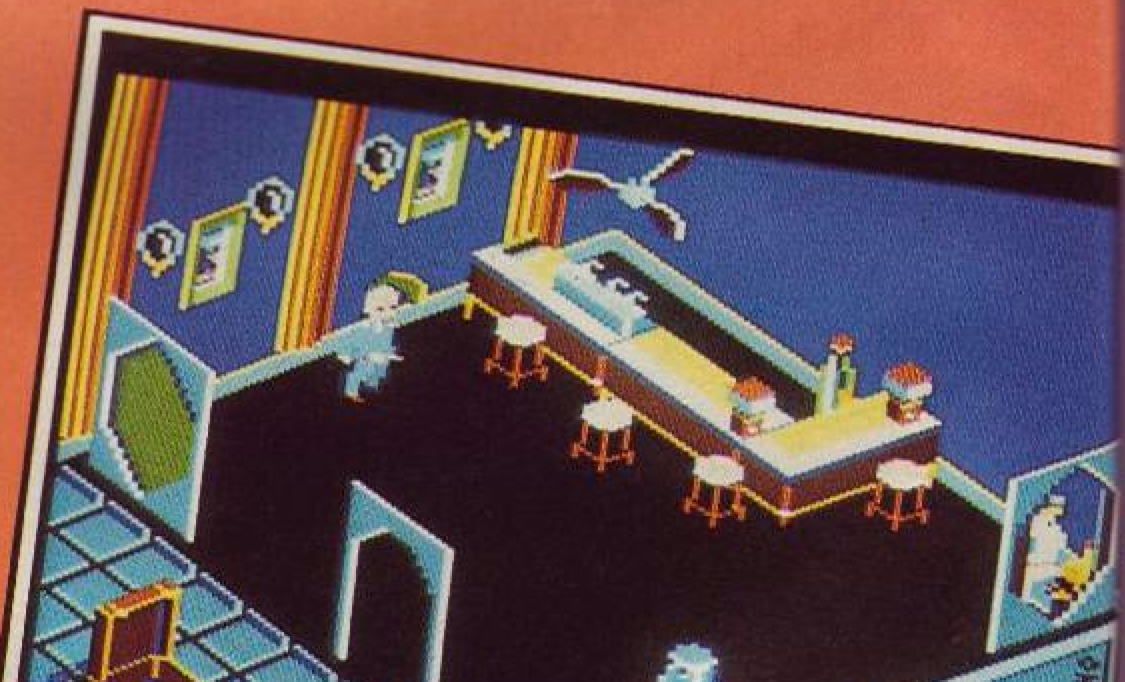
SECOND OPINION

Was there a clause in the Channel Tunnel agreement about us taking their software? If so, we got a good deal. This game is magnifique. *There's so much to it that it will provide a long-term challenge for anyone, even people who've been practising on British arcade-adventures for the past two years.*

PC

He won't chase you but will still drain energy when you touch him. The rooms they appear in are always well guarded so that shortly after entering them an alarm goes off and homing robots swarm in after you. With all that going on all you have to work out is how to get the code out of him.

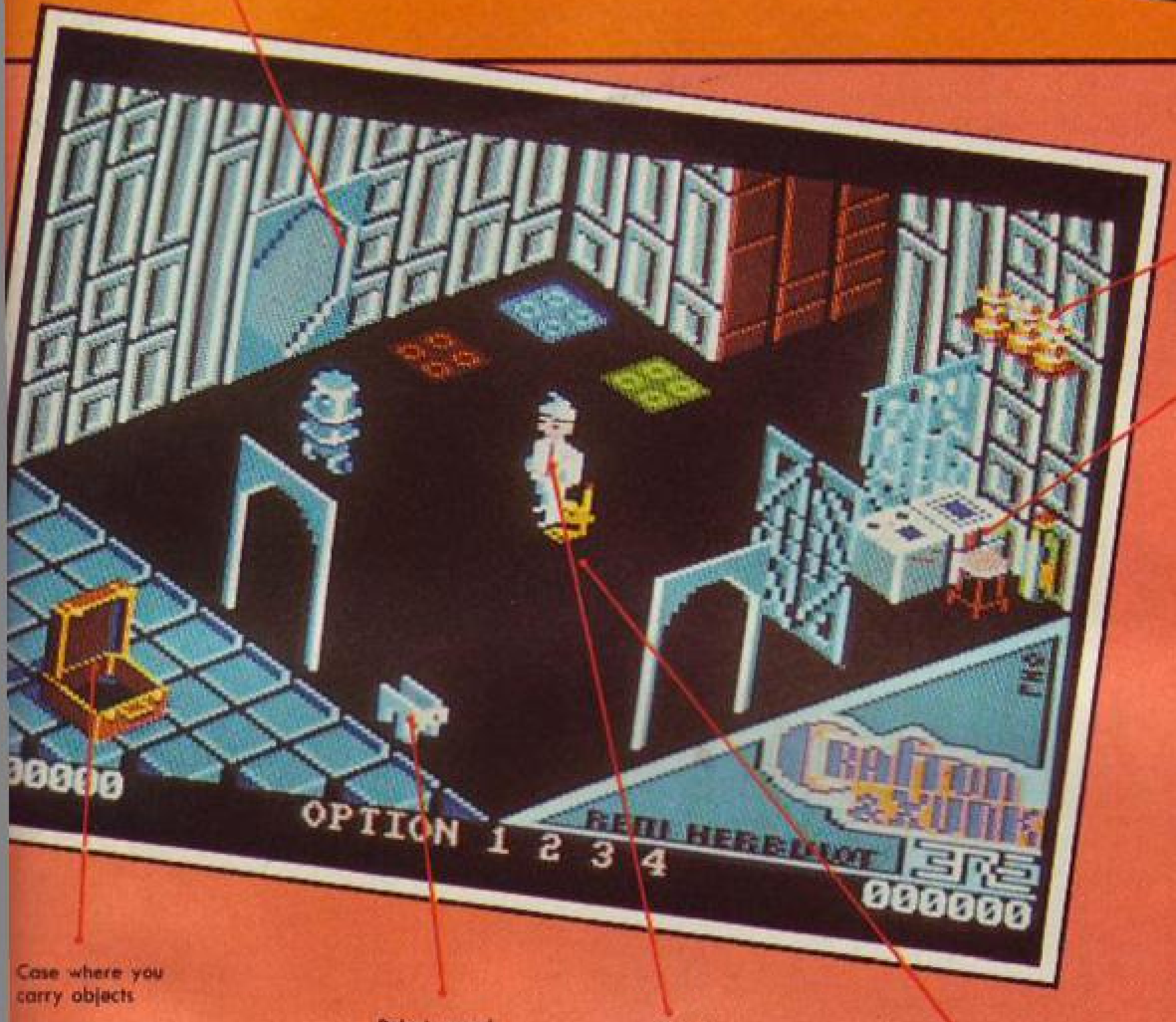
That precious commodity, energy, can be



The punk is intent on doing you plenty of damage



Dexter and Scooter in the colourful, futuristic surroundings



Special Features

One of the things that really makes the game special is the attention to detail. Lots of little touches are thrown in which are a delight to discover as you explore your surroundings. Just when you think you've seen everything it will throw another little surprise.

Telling you about them would spoil the fun, but to whet your appetite here are a couple of examples. When you manage to destroy a ceratin type of robot it will explode with a large splash, leaving a pool on the floor on which Dexter will skid and slide on the seat of his pants. There is also a room where when you try to walk towards the doors a metal gate hammers down in front of you. You *can* get out – but you'll have to buy the game to find out how.

replenished at "holophonic cabins" which should prove a very uplifting experience.

In nearly all rooms there are objects and pieces of furniture that can be pushed, pulled, picked up, dropped, stacked, jumped on and generally messed about in order to get to vital objects and doors. This is a real fun element since you have immense freedom as to what to do with things – you can try anything, anywhere, anytime. Floor pads can be interesting as these can operate doors, release guards or spin Dexter about losing him energy. There are lifts as well – if you know how to use them.

Dexter's constant companion throughout all of this is Scooter, a podocephalus consisting of a foot, a head and a pogoing movement pattern. He bounces merrily about the screen doing nothing helpful and generally just getting in the way of everyone. However if you whistle him he'll come to heel and you can use him to jump on to reach things in the absence of furniture. He will also warn you of slippery floors by bouncing about them on his head. Apart from anything else though – he's cute.

This really is a superb piece of work. It has marvellous graphics and animation, good title music and free music on the tape B side, fast action, great puzzles, cartoon instructions, bags of humour, good personalities and hosts of surprise features. What more can you want?

BW

THIRD OPINION

If you're looking for graphic perfection, insane humour and a huge task all in one game, this is it. Enough said.

AW

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Important aspects of the game are colour-coded, and the shades aren't all too easy to tell apart. More importantly, you miss the bright, imaginative use of colour. It's still amazingly good, though.

AW

GOOD NEWS

- **Colourful and detailed screens and animation.**
- **Lots of puzzling tasks to figure out.**
- **Many objects and furniture to move and use.**
- **Plenty of humour in instructions and game.**
- **Special features that surprise and delight.**
- **The only podocephalus in existence.**

BAD NEWS

- **Find some – we couldn't.**

GRAPHICS	94%
SONICS	61%
GRAB FACTOR	91%
STAYING POWER	95%
A A RATING	94%

TOMAHAWK

Digital Integration, £9.95 cass, £14.95 cass, joystick with keys or keys

This is the first ever helicopter simulation on the Amstrad and comes from the people who brought you one of the oldest and yet still most respected flight simulators, *Fighter Pilot*. It's based on the US Apache helicopter, hence the appearance of Red Indian axes in the name of the game.It's in a similar vein to *Strike Force Harrier* with just as much action and even better graphics.

The game takes place on a 100x200 mile scale map split up into 200 sectors in which one of four types of mission can be taken on. The first is a simple training mission in which you can familiarize yourself with the flight controls without too much enemy harassment. The other three are tough combat set ups where skilled flying and fighting are called for.

Your view is through the front of the Apache with an instrument panel at the base of the screen giving all the necessary flight and weapons information. Take off and flight are relatively easy to achieve, all you have to do is turn the throttle up full and change the angle of the rotor blades, using the "collective", to give you lift. Pushing forward on the stick will then give you forward flight as you dip the nose of the chopper. Practice will enable you to control the vertical speed and hover.

Slowing down and landing are a different matter though – helicopters don't have brakes. Weaving to cause air resistance should do the job but practice as ever teaches you the tricks. There isn't too much more to the flying – it's mainly a matter of being aware of your height, speed and vertical speed.

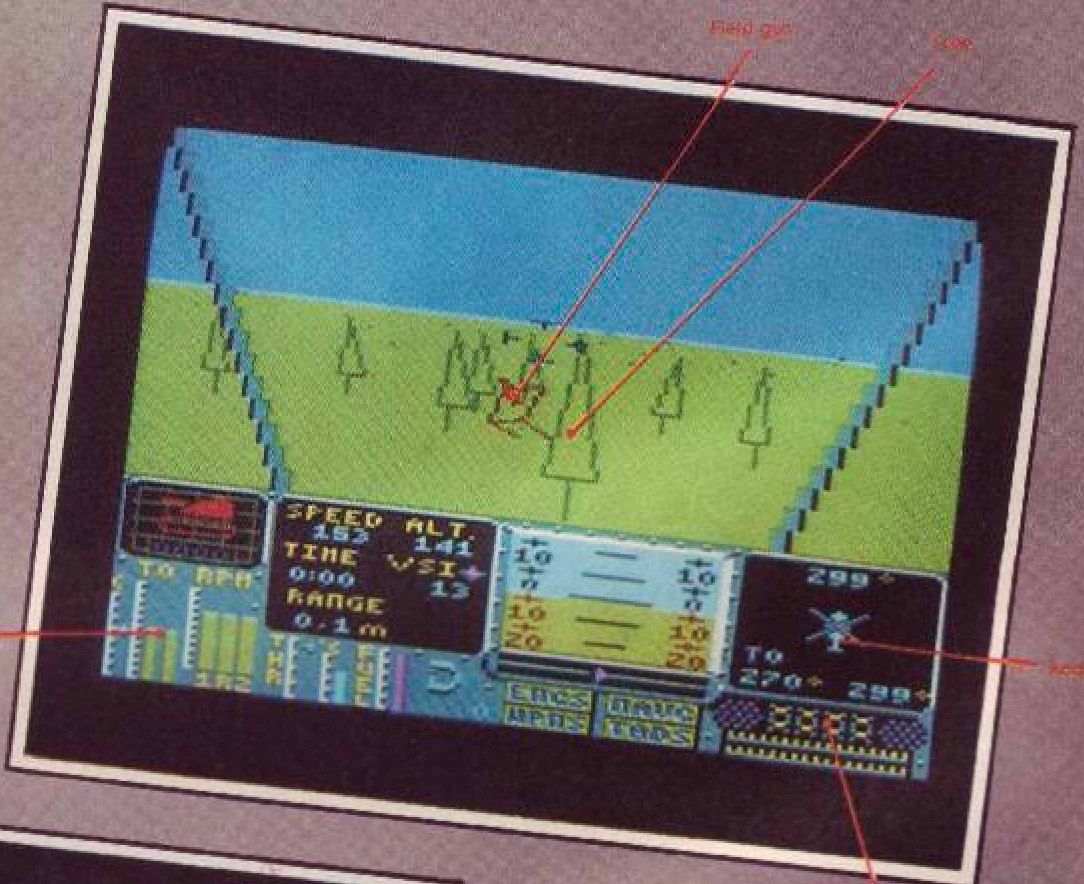
Once in the air and flying around you can start to admire the scenery. It's different every time you play the game so you can't map out the features but the same ones are always there. All the features are drawn with vector graphics and although this means they lose some solidity they move very smoothly around screen and not as jerkily as the "sprites" in *Strike Force Harrier*. There are groups of mountains and trees which can be flown through or crashed into if you're not careful. Buildings also appear which again can be inspected very closely and collided with by the unwary.

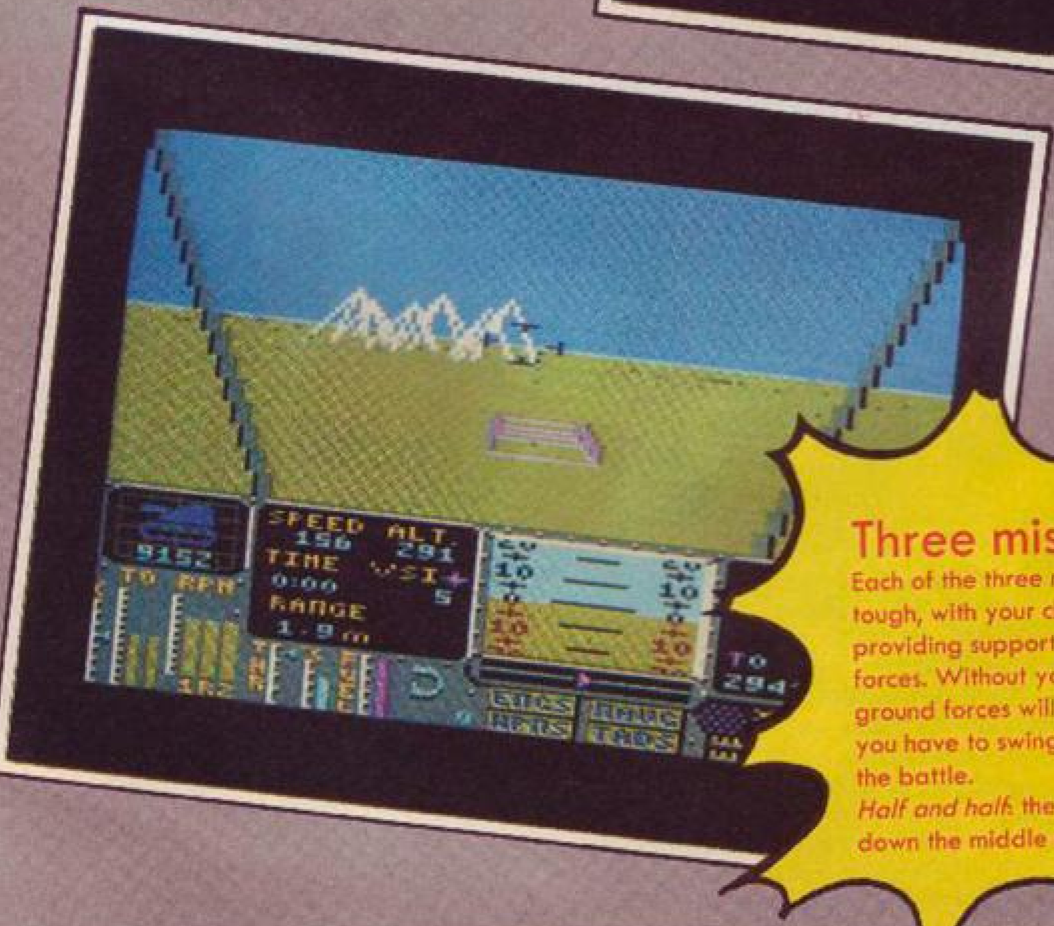
The other major features are of course

SECOND OPINION

If you want to simulate flight – and engage in battle at the same time – you need look no further. This game has just about everything you could want except goggles. Graphically it's excellent, while the options provide lavish amounts of long-term interest.

PC





Three missions

Each of the three missions is tough, with your chopper providing support to the ground forces. Without your efforts the ground forces will always lose – you have to swing the balance of the battle.

Half and half: the map is split down the middle and you have to push the opposing forces back off the edge of the map.

Total occupation: the whole map except for one square is enemy occupied so you have to try to retake the area.

Broken advance: a random line of conflict between the forces is established across the map and you have to push the enemy back to their edge.

Not just 1, not even 2, but THREE opinions! Is Bob Wade bionic?

the forces. These consist mostly of tanks and field guns on the ground and a single helicopter that chases you in the air. All three can inflict damage on the chopper, knocking it out of the sky eventually. They can be destroyed using your three weapon systems, laser guided missiles (fire and forget), rockets and cannon fire, although cannon fire doesn't work on tanks. Points are awarded for the type of target destroyed and the weapon system used (more points for using cannon).

There are plenty of options for altering the game including night flying, a cloud layer in which you fly blind, crosswinds and turbulence, four skill levels and a green screen option. The instrument display is packed with good stuff like radar, target identification, engine readouts and weapon status but it can be easily used at a glance.

There are four bases in each sector which can be landed at for repair and re-equipping but to start with you'll be happy flying around and shooting things. Packed with so many good things this is a more than worthy succesor to *Fighter Pilot* and will provide you with plenty of action.

BW

THIRD OPINION

Simulators certainly have come on a long way since Fighter Pilot *The days are gone when you could have either a realistic simulator or a worthwhile game, but not both. This game quite definitely is both.*

AW

B A D N E W S

▶ Not very original in the jetstream of *Strike Force Harrier*.

G O O D N E W S

▶ Superb graphics combining solid colour and vectors.



▶ Great flying controls – not too tough but not too easy.
▶ Nice mixture of simulator and comabt.
▶ Four different missions.
▶ Even better than *Strike Force Harrier*.

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

There's a green screen option. What more could you want?

PC

GRAPHICS	93%
SONICS	63%
GRAB FACTOR	91%
STAYING POWER	92%
A A RATING	92%

KAISER
Ariolasoft, £7.95 cass, joystick or keys

If any of you out there suffer from the strange desire to become the German Kaiser, then – to use an old computer-game-review cliché – this is the game for you. Even if you don't you wish to achieve Kaiser status, you may find something to intrigue you if you have an interest in strategy games.

Kaiser is a game for 2-9 players in which the aim is to manage land, taxes, armies etc. in order to win *lebensraum* and domination of the other princelings with similarly grandiose ideas. The game starts in the year 1700, so both economies and armies are fairly primitive – corn and cavalry seem to be the main factors.

After players have been assigned suitably Teutonic areas to rule the first screen of the turn displays details of weather, grain prices and stocks, the population's food requirements, your land and cash assets. Bearing in mind that you are obliged by treaty to furnish the peasants with a minimum of grain – and possibly more than that to keep the wretches alive – you will need to either buy or sell to get the right stocks. Naturally , buying and selling at the right time are essential. As the instructions make clear, you must 'speculate to accumulate'.

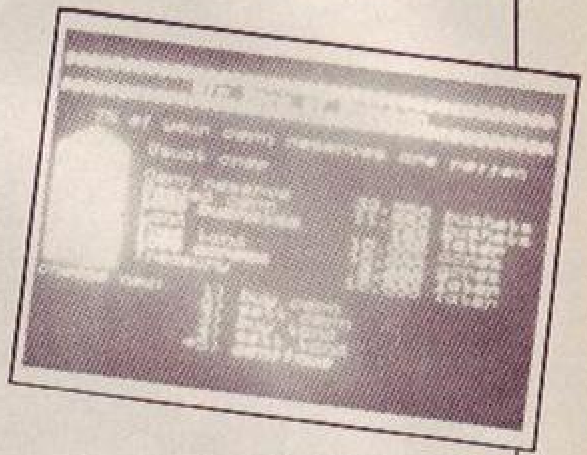
SECOND OPINION

I can't say I enjoyed this very much – it reminded me far too much of old Dictator *games I played on a ZX81. It may have some enjoyment as a multi player strategy game but even then it will take a lot of enthusiasm from the players parts to get much enjoyment. Much too old a game to have much appeal.*

BW

If you haven't distributed enough grain, you'll find on the next screen – Statistics – that rather more people are dying in your lands than are being born. This is obviously very bad for business.

As you will see when you move on to the Budget Day screen. Here you can alter the three rates of taxation on offer. You have to find the right balance to maximize revenue. Listening to Nigel Lawson for a few tips on incentives to wealth-creation could be useful.



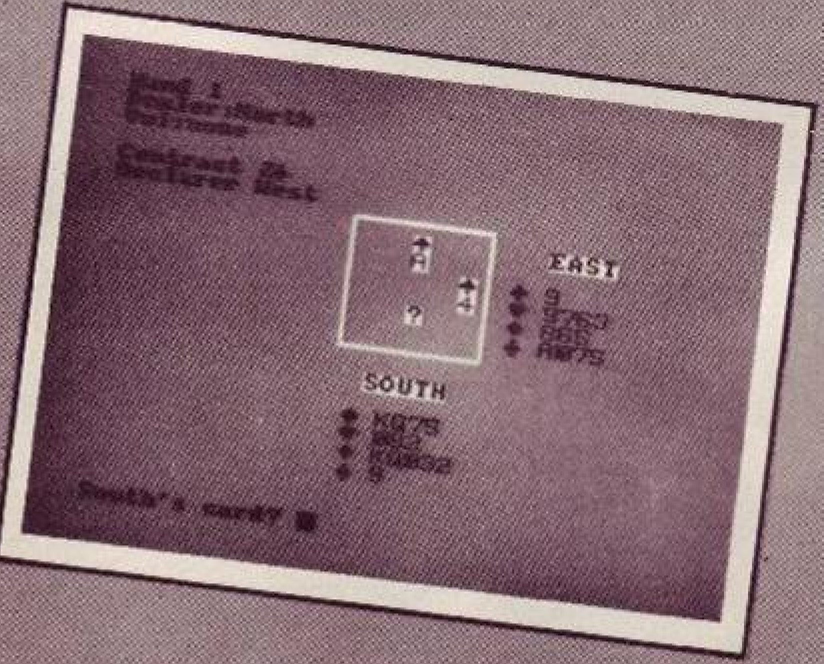
Lots of rotten grain in*Kaiser*

At this point you can also alter the 'jurisdiction' rating, shown on screen by the scales of justice. You can choose from merciful, fair, hard and severe. If you choose the first the cunning population will probably cheat your exchequer out of loot, thinking they won't be punished even if they're caught. Go for severity and you'll lose money as the peasants flee your

BRIDGE PLAYER 3
CP Software, £12.95 cass, £15.95 disk

If you want to play bridge, you've got a slight problem – how are you going to find three other people to play with? A computer bridge program could be the answer – a program that bids and plays three hands, and does the scoring into the bargain. Bridge programs are none too common – good ones are distinctly rare. Prior to the release of *Bridge Player 3* Arnold owners have had to use Kuma's *Bridge*, a rather weaker effort, or do without.

It's not just a question of low demand. Bridge programs are very difficult to write compared to computer board games. They take a lot of time, and consume large amounts of memory. *Bridge Player 3* weighs in at around the 40K mark, making it the same sort of size as *Cyrus II* or *Colossus Chess* – both of them strong chess players by human standards. *Bridge Player 3* is much weaker – you certainly do not have to be a strong player to hold your own against it.



Of course, bridge is a very different proposition from chess. For a start, there is a sizeable element of chance in the game. You can bias the spread of honours in your favour if you want to be declarer, but there is no way to bias it against you if you want to practice your defensive play – an odd omission.

SECOND OPINION

Bridge is a game that's played in pairs in which you have to kick your partner's shins to cheat. It's played by retired army officers, ancient vicars and Egyptian film stars. As you will realise, I'm so ignorant that there's nothing useful I can say about this prog.

PC

The real area of difference – and difficulty – is bidding. Here you have to rely on your computerised partner to behave sensibly, and this can be truly nerve-wracking. Bridge bidding is a complex business even with a human partner, and thorough understanding of your partner's bidding system is essential. The documentation is rather light here – the program uses the Acol system, but if you don't know what that is you won't find much help in the manual. It is in fact a fairly natural and sensible system, but the program does not apply it with tremendous skill. It seems to make game bids on scant information, or even against the evidence it has. As for slams, CP claim that it will recognise, but not initiate, Blackwood – in practice it jumps to slam so rapidly you will probably not have time.

heavy-handed 'justice'.

You can now spend money – if you've got any. On your way to Kaiserhood you'll need to expand your principality, building houses, palaces and cathedrals. But you can't build a cathedral, for example, until you've grabbed at least 25,000 acres. You'll also need huge cash reserves to back up your expansion.

THIRD OPINION

Quite fun if you've never played one of these grain-for-the-peasants efforts before. Not quite so much fun if you're paying for it – or if you've played any game written in the last five years.

AW

Well, there's always war, isn't there? Your army is puny to begin with, but if you acquire enough cash you can recruit cavalry, artillery and infantry either from the local population or in the form of mercenaries. You'll need to take them on manoeuvres, and this will cost money.

The problem with armies is that you need a minimum size before the program will allow you to go out and wage war – unless you're a financial wizard it could take some time. Once you've started, though, treaties can be made and battles fought. The more players, the merrier the war.

Kaiser has entertaining elements but is marred by the poor graphics and unclear type used for the display. And at least two people will be needed to play it. Furthermore, it shows signs of a hasty translation fromn the German original: one of your taxes is the strange 'added value tax', while you are also able to 'recruite' soldiers and get 'sqadrons' of cavalry. *Kaiser* may appeal to strategy fans, but it's unlikely to make many converts.

PC



G O O D N E W S

- Up to nine players can take part
- The scenario's different

B A D N E W S

- Weak graphics and sound
- Needs at least 2 players
- Some rough translation
- Essentially, an old-fashioned game

GRAPHICS	5%
SONICS	5%
GRAB FACTOR	29%
STAYING POWER	41%
A A RATING	37%

These sorts of drawbacks are commonplace in computer bridge, and should not be allowed to obscure the program's strength in card play. As declarer you'll find East and West worthy opponents, while in defence North is a useful ally. Strong players won't have much to worry about but novices should find the program very helpful as practice.

Another area where *BP3* comes up trumps is on playing options. As well as biasing the deal you can set the bidding system's no-trump to weak, strong or variable – though the manual doesn't explain this last setting properly – or dispense with the bidding entirely and simply state the contract you want. During the play of cards you can peep at the other players' hands, examine those tricks already played or restart the hand altogether. You can also abandon the hand without score, or claim the rest of the tricks.

There are a few options – stepping back through the play, or conceding the rest of the tricks – which should be available and aren't, but these are hardly serious omissions. A must for all the bridge playing Arnold users out there.

AW

THIRD OPINION

A bridge program loses much of the fun of the real thing because you don't have an unpredictable human to react to. This one won't suit beginners either unless they get additional information on bidding, which I needed particularly when the computer started making weird bids. Not bad for those who know the game but otherwise too expensive and too complicated.

BW

G O O D N E W S

- Good range of options.
- Strong card play.
- No need for three other players.

B A D N E W S

- Poor documentation.
- Bidding can be erratic.
- No good if you don't play bridge.
- A trifle on the expensive side?

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Perfectly clear, but unspectacular.

AW

GRAPHICS	10%
SONICS	2%
GRAB FACTOR	53%
STAYING POWER	62%
A A RATING	58%

PANZADROME

Ariolasoft £8.95 cass, joystick only

Though billed as a game of senseless destruction, *Panzadrome* has a lot more to do with senseless frustration. The "Panzadrome" itself is an island teeming with robot tanks, strewn with landmines and bristling with gun turrets, all of them hostile. Now, all you have to do is destroy it. All of it. The whole island.

Your vehicle is displayed in detail at the start of each game, first as its main components – chassis, wheels and 80mm gun – and secondly as a whole. This then drives off the side of the screen, and you switch to the overhead view in which the

SECOND OPINION

Initially quite intriguing , but it rapidly palled. The graphics are too abstract to be very pleasurable and the gameplay soon becomes confusing and frustrating.

PC

on an area of island complete with buildings, roads, and a stretch of beach. There's also your vehicle – small, blue and nothing like the pre-game diagram – and the enemy, in the form of prowling robot tanks. You have to blast your way through the opposition, in search of factories to equip your vehicle with more exciting weaponry.

The opposition come in three main types. The easiest are the standard tanks whose guns, like your 80mm, need a clear line of fire and several hits to kill anything. More deadly are the mortar tanks, which can lob their bombs over intervening buildings to hit you. Worst of all, but thankfully stationary, are the "mega-turrets". These bombard you mortar-fashion, and can only be destroyed by repeated shots at point blank range.

All of these will deplete your armour, and once that is destroyed will start to damage your vehicle's systems. Mines, on the other hand, will cause systems damage immediately. They are triggered by your driving over them, and in tight spots can be

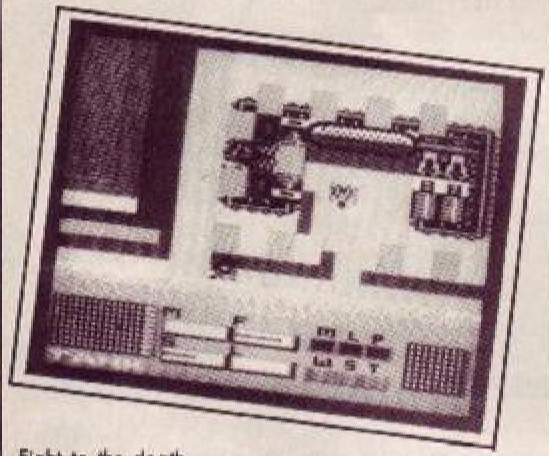
hard to avoid. Worse still, they are visible only on the separate mine-scanner display. The only way to clear them is to re-equip with mine-proof caterpillar tracks – and for that, you have to find the appropriate factory.

THIRD OPINION

The graphics are the most disappointing thing. After all that build up with hi-res tank pictures you get a garish bunch of blocky colour. The gameplay I found distinctly frustrating because you can get trapped so easily and one mistake may blow you away and you'll have to start all over again. Needs a fair amount of improvement in my book.

BW

This would add up to a straightforward mine-dodging shoot-'em-up, but for one problem – craters. Every time you destroy an enemy tank, every time a mortar tank or mega-turret scores a near miss, you are left with a crater. These craters are permanent, and seriously obstructive. You cannot drive or fire shells over them. If a narrow passage has only one crater, it becomes impassable. Indiscriminate fire can easily leave you blocked in and forced to abort the game, so great care is needed. The solution is once again to re-equip, this time with a "polycrete" module. Polycrete is a type of quick-setting cement ideally suited for filling in craters, as luck would have it. Of course, the problem is finding the factory.



Fight to the death inside the Panzadrome

The graphics on all of this are colourful, but extremely unrealistic – the tanks in particular are small and very un-tanklike. The sound is very weak, the only useful effect being the blip-blip noise made by incoming mortar bombs. The gameplay, then, has to carry the game – and in the early stages it looks quite promising. There's an enormous amount of frustration involved at first, boxing yourself in with your own shell-craters or getting wrecked by sitting in a turret's firing line. Once you're equipped properly, though, most of this ceases to apply. The later game is quite dull, and not really worth the effort of getting that far. The Panzadrome isn't that large either – there are 64 screens, but many of these serve no particular purpose. What you really need is some sort of reward for your effort and patience. What you *get* is more of the same, and a score apparently fixed at 0%. Is frustration really all you want in a game?

AW

G O O D N E W S

- **Plenty of tough opposition to blast through.**
- **New equipment varies the gameplay.**

B A D N E W S

- **Very frustrating.**
- **Poor graphics.**
- **Lengthy, irrelevant start sequences.**

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Very hard to tell what is what and what's going on.

PC

GRAPHICS	49%
SONICS	19%
GRAB FACTOR	58%
STAYING POWER	55%
A A RATING	53%

INDOOR SOCCER

Magnificent Seven, £4.95 cass, joystick or keys

Having hung up their cowboy boots and six guns the Magnificent Seven have turned to software and come up with a couple of sporting simulations. This version of five a side football is very reminiscent of Ocean's *Match Day* but doesn't live up to it in many ways.

The action takes place on a large left-right scrolling pitch with five players on either team, one of whom acts as a goal-keeper. You can play against another player or the computer, which has three skill levels. The game takes place over two five minute halves, the teams changing ends at half time.

SECOND OPINION

Gruesome scrolling almost prevented from playing thihs, but I persevered and almost enjoyed it. At the end of the day, though, David, it's not a very skilful game.

PC

If you are in possession you control the player with the ball, who can be moved around the pitch and kick the ball. When the other team are in possession the computer picks a player for you to control and go after the ball. To get possesion you run into the player or tackle him by pressing fire, which may make him fall over.

The edge of the pitch is blocked by boards which the ball bounces off and you can't get it in the air. When the goal is threatened the keeper can be moved up and down to block the ball, bouncing it out

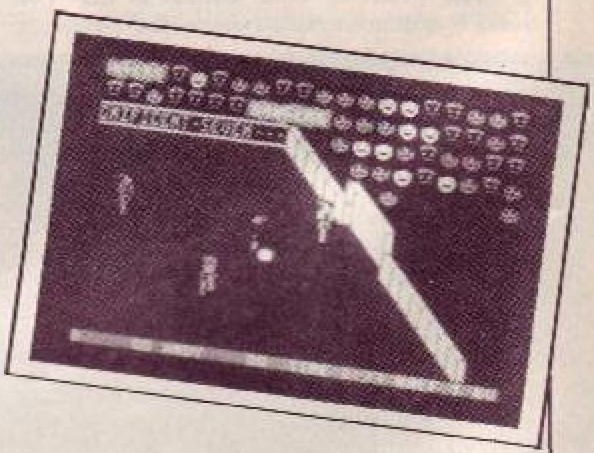
THIRD OPINION

Gameplay is pretty poor, and the graphics are diabolical. And why do the crowd all support Rangers?

AW

for any player to collect it. Against the computer the gameplay is rather simple, although it is a tough opponent on the second and third levels. The graphics and sound are very ordinary with a very funny looking crowd. Certainly not much to shout about here.

BW



I'm sick as a parrot about this one Brian

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Nothing to complain about here. Nothing to get excited about, either.

AW

G O O D N E W S

- **Tough computer opponent.**

B A D N E W S

- ***Match Day* is better.**
- **Jerky scrolling.**
- **Repetitive gameplay.**

GRAPHICS	41%
SONICS	28%
GRAB FACTOR	33%
STAYING POWER	30%
A A RATING	31%



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FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

Ocean, £9.95 cass, joystick or keys

The game doesn't have a lot to do with the group but identifies well with their image. There are all sorts of weird elements providing plenty of variety to the action but nothing controversial – except for the now ageing recording of "Relax" on the B side of the tape.

The game begins in Mundanesville where your undetailed and badly animated character can wander through streets of boring terraced houses. These are shown in a sort of 3D view but it has very little depth on the screen. Each house contains two or three rooms with some mundane furniture, making every house look nearly the same and instilling you with a feeling of suburban boredom. Having lulled you into a sense of security and general disinterest the game starts to spring its surprises.

By searching the rooms and furniture objects can be discovered, up to eight of which can be carried at once. These may not have any immediately apparent use but as more of the game is discovered the need for flak jackets, pleasure pills and wedding rings will become clear. They can be used in any location but will disappear even if you use them where they are of no real use.

Having become familiar with the surroundings you can start to work towards the main aim of the game, which is – in authentic eighties style – to become a complete person. To do this you have to score 99,000 pleasure points and get four bar charts to their highest point. This will allow you to enter the heart of the Pleasure Dome where... well, you'll have to find out for yourselves. The four charts are labelled with a symbol and are boosted by completing particular tasks within the game. When they reach the top they cause a letter to appear, the four of which spell the word BANG.

Some tasks can be completed in Mundanesville but most of them take place on single screens of a surreal nature. The screens can be accessed by going through particular doors or by finding other locations where they can be directly entered. They appear as windows in the screen and walking into them will take you to that location. This window technique is one of the best aspects of the game and is a novel feature.

Each screen is a simple arcade-type game which may consist of a challenge of skill, reflexes or puzzling. To win, the player will have to complete all of them. Another way of getting between these screens is through the corridors of power, a labyrinth in which it is easy to get lost.

One other major feature of the game is a murder mystery in Mundanesville which you have to solve. You have to find the killer by finding 23 pieces of information that will lead to the killer's identity. When you think you know who it is you can accuse the suspect back at the scene of the crime. Get it wrong, though, and you will

SECOND OPINION

I never thought I'd do what Frankie Say, but this game almost convinced me. It's a very neat concept and the goal of becoming a real person is one which will appeal to many of us who worry about our identities. The graphics are pretty naff but don't really detract too much from the game.

PC

THIRD OPINION

Tons of variety, sure enough, so it's a shame about the miserable animation. It's certainly a clever idea – a graphic adventure which throws you into arcade sequences every so often – but the arcade action is pretty limited. A must for anyone who wants a really original adventure – otherwise, it's a bit disappointing.

AW

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

That animation really starts to drag, with no colour to distract you. Still, it certainly makes Mundanesville good and mundane.

AW

DOOMSDAY BLUES

PSS/Ere Informatique, £9.95 cass, £14.95 disk, joystick or keys

Although not as awe-inspiring as the other French game reviewed this month it contains many original and entertaining features that should make it a success as well. It's set in a prison where the last survivor – so *he* thinks – of the human race is imprisoned by robots. He is trying to escape and his efforts are redoubled by the sound of a woman's voice.

The prisoner starts in a cell furnished only with a bed. The door is locked and the only other thing in the room is a one Franc piece. How you get out is quickly solved by your main weapon in the game – your right foot. This can be used to gradually batter the door down as the unhappy looking prisoner rather humourously lashes out with his size 13's.

SECOND OPINION

A shame this game wasn't released in 1984, when it's foreboding atmosphere would have fitted in well with the publicity surrounding the year of the book. The grim cell-blocks and the robotic gaolers are fitting symbols of what some fear the future has in store for us.

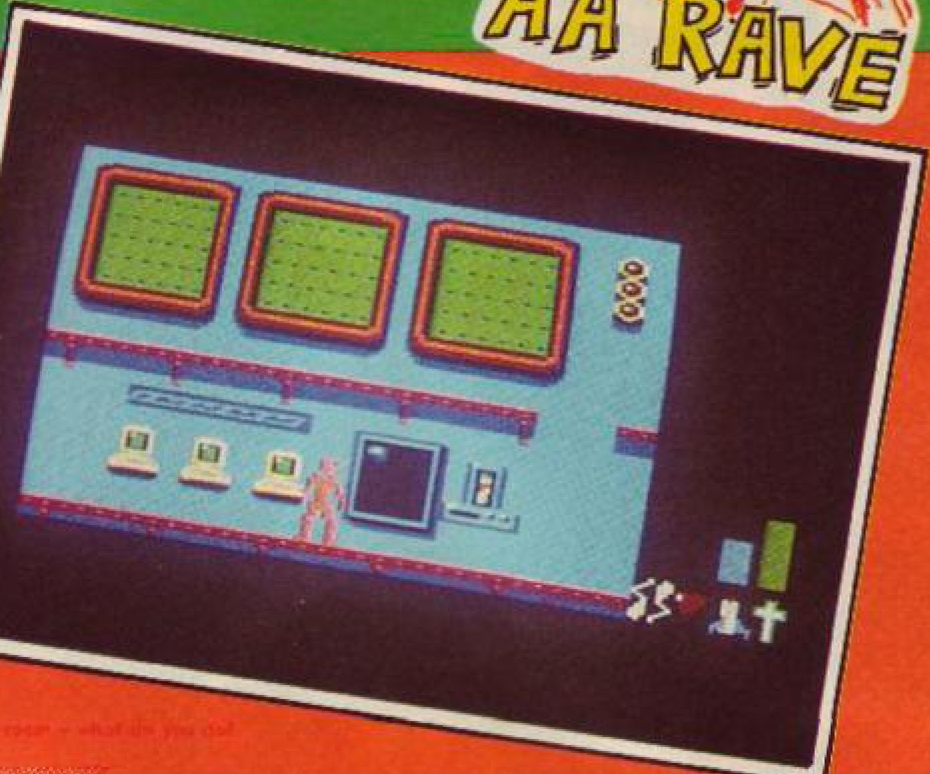
The game has plenty to keep you occupied and – if my experience is anything to go by – you won't find it easy. But it's originality should merit your attention.

PC



The depressing sight of a deserted cell block

AA RAVE



The terminal room – what do you do?

return to the start of the game.

The graphics are generally a little disappointing, particularly the main character, but this is made up for by the pleasant rendition of "Two Tribes" throughout the game and the very addictive gameplay. As more and more elements of the game are discovered it's very difficult to stop trying to be a real person and you could find yourself playing for many hours at a time.

BW

Arcade Screens

The Terminal Room: You can access computer terminals and a disk drive to enter other rooms.
Sea of Holes: Six oscillating holes which owe more to Sergeant Pepper than Frankie.
Cybernetic Breakout: A version of the computer classic but there's only one thing to hit.
Raid over Merseyside: Protect Merseyside from attack in a shoot-em-up.
The ZTT Room: A quick blast followed by some tough puzzling.
Talking Heads: Two flags battle out a war of attrition.
Shooting Gallery: Take pot shots at world leaders against a tough time limit.
War Room: Shoot symbols to access other screens.

GOOD NEWS

- **Many different elements and arcade sequences.**
- **A lot of depth to the game with new discoveries all the time.**
- **Many objects and puzzles.**
- **Good mix of arcade games and puzzling.**
- **Nice Two Tribes music.**

BAD NEWS

- **Graphics are disappointing – particularly the main character.**
- **You may have difficulty grasping one or two of the concepts involved.**

GRAPHICS	58%
SONICS	74%
GRAB FACTOR	86%
STAYING POWER	82%
A A RATING	83%

AA RAVE

THIRD OPINION

Gloomy to look at, at first, and not too great on the gameplay side either – until you break out of the cell block, that is. It's tough to get into, all right – but what with killer robots, fortifying wine and the seediest looking hero ever, it's well worth the effort.

AW

At the start of the game you will also have had to allocate the prisoner's three energies. These are strength, bravery and fitness, each of which will be of use in different ways. Strength is used up by kicking down doors but can be replaced by eating. The only problem is finding something to get your gnashers into because at first sight this prison is decidedly bare.

Fitness is also a crucial energy because running out of that will end the game. It is used up by the passage of time, moving around and through encounters with robot guards. The passage of time is a very important element since it affects many elements in the game, most importantly the robots. In cell blocks a robot will come out at night while in other areas they appear during the day. Merely being in their view will damage your fitness and kill you very rapidly.

Robots can be destroyed if you have enough bravery. This allows you to go eyeball to eyeball with them, like two boxers weighing each other up. If you've got enough bravery you'll outlast the robot. Fitness and bravery can also be replenished by wine and coffee respectively but finding them is again the problem.

There are several different areas in the game ranging from the stark open cell blocks to dingy underground rooms and bright, pleasant quarters. Finding these can be extremely difficult and calls for a lot of exploration, efficient use of your limited resources and some luck. Replenishing your energies may not be easy either as you may need to buy supplies with limited cash.

There are touches of humour to lighten your depressing situation though. When you walk into the wall the character recoils with a yell and when he does die he collapses into a heap in a funny little graphic routine. His walking and kicking actions are also nicely done and the cell blocks manage to conjure up an oppressive atmosphere of fear. The game also features some nice music on the title and end screens which should have you bopping along.

Although the game may take a while to get into each new discovery will keep you interested and keen for more. There has obviously been plenty of original thought put into the game and the creation of a good atmosphere helps things along as well. May not suit all tastes but will certainly be a tough one to crack.

BW

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Even grimmer than the original to look at – and that's very grim indeed.

AW



ocean
ULTIMATE
PLAY THE GAME
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They sold a
MILLION
II
BRUCE LEE
PSION
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G O O D   N E W S

- Atmospheric graphics and action.
- Good features like kicking and death routine.
- Good music on title screen.
- Tough game task calling for fast and efficient action.
- Time element adds extra dimension to the action.

B A D   N E W S

- There can be a lot of waiting around.
- Takes some time to get into properly.

GRAPHICS	62%
SONICS	77%
GRAB FACTOR	77%
STAYING POWER	83%
A A RATING	80%

NOMAD

Ocean, £8.95 cass, joystick or keys

Nothing to do with roaming desert peoples, but a Nemesis Organisation Mobile Attack Droid that is on a mission to destroy one Cyrus T Gross in the heart of his heavily fortified city. To do that it has to battle past many different levels and types of defence that will make life extremely tough for even the best players.

The city is composed of many screens, nearly all of which have some sort of deadly obstacle in them. They are flick screens mostly connected by corridors giving you only one possible exit to continue your search. At some points you will have a choice though so that exploration will be needed to find the easiest and quickest route.

SECOND OPINION

Nothing spectacular here – it's essentially just a colourful shoot-em-up. As such it delivers the goods. But are they the goods that we want very much these days?

PC

The Nomad itself is difficult to control at first as it has some awkward movement characteristics. It can be moved forward or reversed but rotates left and right to point in the desired direction. This makes rapid turning difficult to achieve. The other thing to be mastered is the inertia which afflicts the machine and will need practice to control so that you don't end up charging into things.

THIRD OPINION

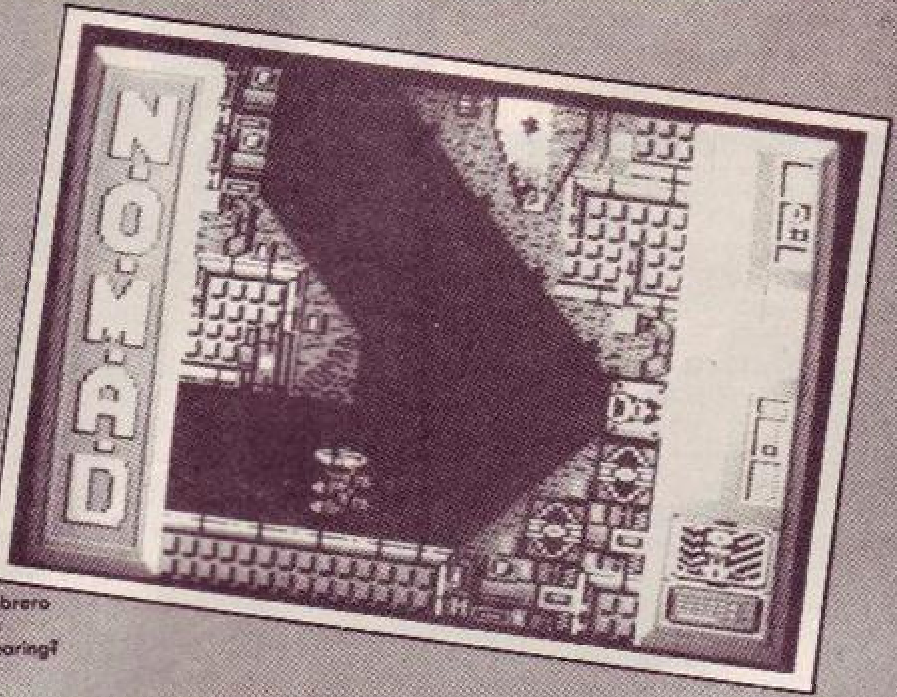
The inertia is infuriating, and the random deaths are frustrating. These can be overcome, though, with a little perseverance – what really does the game in is the feeble firepower you've got, the dreadful sound and the ridiculous explosions. It's a budget game without the cheapness.

AW

The other thing that will restrict Nomad's movement but not kill him are the gateways that crop up. These are opened and closed by switches that Nomad can activate. Unfortunately these aren't on the same screen so that trial and error is needed to find the correct position for a switch to allow you to move on.

The first obstacle you encounter in Gross's armoury is a circular unit which randomly spits out fire in any direction. Like all the other defences this can be blasted away with Nomad's twin lasers leaving a nasty explosion mark on the screen. The next weapon is the one most commonly encountered in the early stages, a cannon.

Cannons are set into the wall and blast out shells at regular intervals that travel in a straight line. Both cannon and shells can be destroyed but one touch from a shell will end a Nomad life. Later obstacles get even more deadly and won't wait for you to come to them. There are bouncing, smiling faces that happily blow you up and square blocks that fire homing missiles which rapidly zoom towards you.



Is that a sombrero our cute little Nomad is wearing?

Another feature that will cause problems are the magnetrons. These are strong magnets set in the walls which attract the Nomad in a particular direction. This acts like gravity so that the Nomad will fall down a screen, often into plenty of trouble that is consequently extremely hard to deal with.

The graphics are very colourful but chunky too so that Nomad has trouble getting round some corners. Once you've got a hang of the control the gameplay can be quite addictive as you try to battle through to new screens. It's basically a simple game that will take some mastering.

BW

G O O D   N E W S

- Very tough to work your way through the whole thing.
- Nice features like the gravity and inertia.
- Rewarding as you progress to a new section.

B A D   N E W S

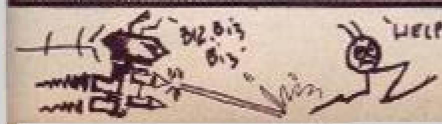
- Some sections rely a lot on luck through random factors.
- Control can be annoyingly hard.

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

A bit easier on the eyes in mono, if anything. Removing all those red/green combinations is a distinct improvement.

AW

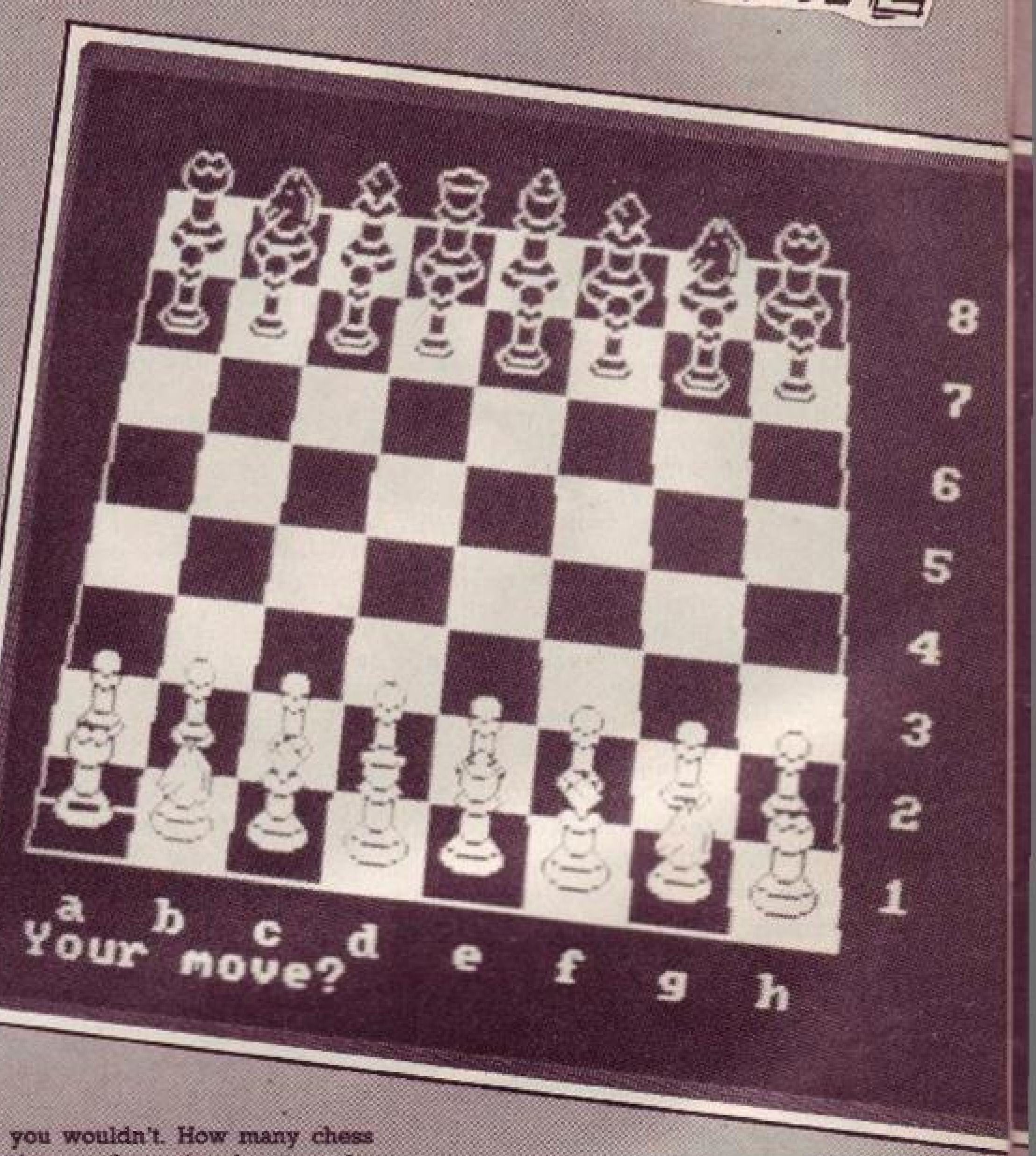
GRAPHICS	57%
SONICS	22%
GRAB FACTOR	56%
STAYING POWER	68%
A A RATING	63%



COLOSSUS CHESS 4.0

CDS, £9.95 cass,£13.95 disk





Computer chess is not everyone's idea of excitement. You might well wonder why anyone would bother waiting hours for Arnold to make an indifferent move – and a lot of chess programs in the past offered just that. Not so *Colossus* – on the default average move time of ten seconds, he can give you some real trouble. If you want a fast, fiendish adversary, then look no further.

First impressions aren't all good, it must be admitted. *Cyrus II* has set a standard for display and ease of use that few will equal, and *Colossus* definitely suffers here. It's perfectly possible to play *Cyrus* without any documentation at all, but you'll need the manual for *Colossus* – and the layout may give you some problems finding the information you need. On the graphic side *Colossus* clearly tries to match *Cyrus* with its 3D board-view option, but the perspective is very poor and the pieces can be hard to differentiate.

Once you get past these points to the game itself, *Colossus* shows where its real strength lies – and strength is definitely the word. It can give a tough game even with a very short move time – once it starts averaging minutes rather than seconds per move, it can be nothing short of terrifying. CDS claim that it beat *Cyrus* 10-6 and 11-5 on comparable speed settings, and a trial in the AA office seemed to bear this out – an impressive middle game performance produced a win for *Colossus*, but poor end game play saw the game stretch to nearly sixty moves. The end game is always an area of weakness for chess programs, and *Colossus* is stronger than most. What did come as a surprise was its indifferent opening performance, given that its openings book boasts 3000 moves to *Cyrus's* 1900.

The first thing you'll want to do, unless you're a strong-ish player yourself, is to reduce the level *Colossus* plays at. Here you find a real plus point – flexibility. Rather than choosing from pre-set levels of play, you set the average move time in minutes and seconds. This could prove extremely useful if you're trying to improve your game, and need to increase the strength of opposition gradually.

The range of options is wide, including tournament, blitz and problem modes. It has more or less all the features you would expect – infinite, equality, backward step – and some you wouldn't. How many chess programs give you the option, for example, of playing "blindfolded"? The disc version also has a large selection of classic computer v. human and computer v. computer games to play through, for those of you who are really interested.

AW

SECOND OPINION

I had a prety engrossing, if embarassing, couple of hours with Colossus. To put it bluntly, it thrashed me. Although the display is nowhere near as attractive as Cyrus's it does play a stronger game. And for the more accomplished player that is surely the main thing. Weaker players will still find Cyrus a handful and may be more tempted by the pretty display.

THIRD OPINION

It may not look as good as Cyrus but the levels and gameplay are far more adaptable to an individual's skill. I'm an instinct player and can't bear analysing positions for long. This means Colossus will play as fast as I do and match my skill i.e. I still lose all the time.

BW

G O O D   N E W S

- **Plays a very strong game.**
- **Fully adjustable.**
- **Good analysis display.**

B A D   N E W S

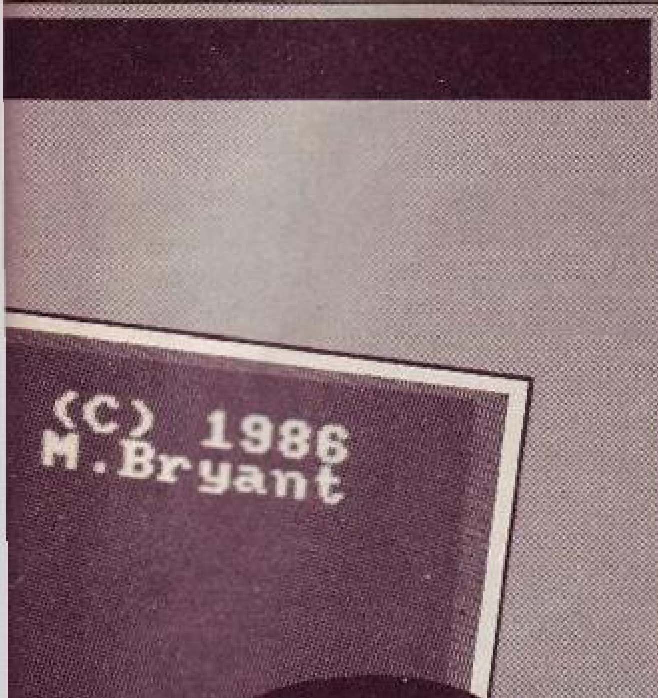
- **Not as pretty as Cyrus.**
- **Cumbersome at first.**
- **Mean!**

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

You can set the colours how you like, but the defaults are fine anyway.

AW

GRAPHICS	62%
SONICS	5%
GRAB FACTOR	88%
STAYING POWER	96%
A A RATING	92%



A brief glossary of computer chess

The *Colossus* manual uses a few terms unique to computer chess:

LOOK-AHEAD – Chess programs analyse possible moves they can make, replies you can make and so on, until they run out of time or you force them to move. The length of the "If I do that and he replies with that and ..." chain is known as the look-ahead. This will vary according to the complexity of the situation, and the program's level of play.

PLY – A single move by one player is known as a "ply". Thus, a "20-move game" is 40 ply in length. Look-ahead is measured in ply rather than moves.

ASSUMED MOVE – Colossus doesn't sit idle while you're thinking about your move. It assumes you're going to make the move it would make in your position, and starts thinking about its reply. This can give it a big time advantage, especially where you are under pressure.

INFINITE – In infinite mode, the computer does not have a time limit for its move. It just carries on analysing the situation until you force it to move.

EQUALITY – In equality mode, sometimes called "adapt" mode, the program does not run to a fixed move time. Instead, it tries to match the average time aken by its opponent for his ast few moves. This serves as a ood demonstration of the rogram's power.

RAMBO

Ocean, £8.95 cass, joystick or keys

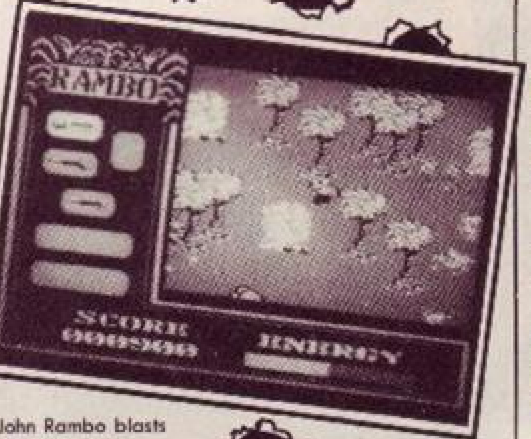
The film grossed massive amounts at the box office and doubtless Ocean are hoping it will do the same sort of business on computers. What the game lacks though is the sort of nationalism and gore that made the film so controversial. Their omission leaves the game as just another blast-em-up.

Our all-American, commie-bashing, muscle-brained hero is on a mission to Vietnam to find American prisoners. He disobeys orders and tries to rescue them, which is of course where you come in. Rambo begins his mission to the South of the POW camp in a jungle positively swarming with Viet Cong and has to complete five stages in order to rescue the POWs.

Initially he is armed with a knife, bow and arrows and explosive arrows but along the way three other weapon systems can be picked up – machine gun, grenades and rocket launcher. These are best used in different situations, the noiseless ones particularly because they don't attract so many of the enemy to your location.

The enemy will shoot at Rambo wherever he is so that you are under constant pressure to keep on the move. When hit his energy is decreased and if it reaches zero the game is over. The enemy can be killed in two ways: either with the weapons you carry or by just running into them.

As Rambo moves around the screen scrolls in the direction he is heading. Controlling the movement itself is the hard thing because it is difficult to get diagonals and our bandoliered hero can easily get stuck behind vegetation. This can prove frustrating since a static Rambo will take a lot of hits, rapidly decreasing his energy.



John Rambo blasts away at some passing Vietnamese

Once inside the POW camp a single prisoner has to be rescued using the knife to cut him free. You then have to go North out of the camp to a clear area where a helicopter is waiting to pick you up. Rambo then has to fly back to the camp to rescue the rest of the prisoners. This is easier said than done since they are quite hard to find and again have to be released using the knife.

Once the prisoners are on the chopper the score will have taken a hefty jump and all you have to do is battle an enemy gunship. This appears on screen and launches rockets at the chopper, which have to be replied to with your own rockets. Hits will again reduce the energy rapidly. This is replenished at each stage but a couple of mistakes on any section will probably result in your downfall.

Games are completed very quickly and you'll only get further through perseverance and a lot of trial and error. The scrolling graphics are reasonable but the music and control are irritating, control in particular causing a lot of frustration. It's in a similar vein to *Who Dares Wins II* but loses out because it has less variety, less control and less to do.

BW

SECOND OPINION

It seems to me that Ocean have missed the boat here. The film was released aeons ago and I wonder how many people still have Rambo on their minds. Well, it wouldn't matter too much if the game were superb, but it's not. The comparison has to be be made with WDWII *and I'm afraid* Rambo *loses out.*

PC

THIRD OPINION

Muddy graphics, awful control and off-key music make this Ocean's most over-hyped game yet. All it has going for it is frustration – and that's just not good enough.

AW

GOOD NEWS

- **Large scrolling playing area.**
- **Nice graphics for jungle and camp.**
- **Completing the game is a tough arcade challenge.**

BAD NEWS

- **Control is frustrating.**
- **Not much variety or depth to the action.**
- **Not as good as *Who Dares Wins II*.**

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

Marginally less colourful in mono.

AW

GRAPHICS	63%
SONICS	41%
GRAB FACTOR	62%
STAYING POWER	54%
A A RATING	58%

TOURNAMENT SNOOKER

Magnificent Seven, £4.95 cass, joystick or keys

You won't find Alex Higgins or Steve Davis popping up on this game but you will find plenty of very classy snooker action that may get you away from the TV and onto the computer. Although there have been snooker games before this one has plenty to reccommend it if you're still looking for some green baize action.

The table is shown from an overhead view with the reds at the right hand side of the screen and the "D" at the left. The display is done in four colours (mode 1 for those in the know) which means the colours have to be represented by a band-coding system. This just means you'll need to check carefully before playing a shot on a colour.

SECOND OPINION

It does seem bizarre that you can't play against the computer. After all, I thought one of the selling points of computers was that you could dispense with other humans altogether. That problem aside, this certainly the best snooker/pool game I've seen on the Amstrad – smooth and realistic.

PC

The game has to be played by two players but there is also a practice mode on which you can learn the skills and cheat a little too. This allows you to move balls around at will, restore positions and set up a situation. If practice doesn't give you an idea of how good you can be then look at the demo mode where two extremely talented players knock the balls in at a frighteningly efficient pace.

When you want to play a shot a cue will appear on the table that can be rotated through 360 degrees around the cue ball. Once it is facing in generally the right direction it can be finely adjusted with some very small angles that are essential for the accuracy involved in snooker. You aren't just left with your view from above, though, which would make angles and shots hard to judge.

THIRD OPINION

The four-colour display is a bit odd, but the gameplay is excellent. Controls are a bit funny – literally. I mean, you move the cue using the 'Q' key. Is this someone's idea of a joke?

AW

A large cue ball in the top left corner of the screen will appear overlayed on the ball that you are currently aiming at. This allows you to determine where on the ball the cue ball will strike. This enlarged cue ball is also used to determine the spin or side put on it. A dot can be moved around it to show where the cue will hit the ball, at the base for backspin and so on.

When a shot is set up you have to decide on the force to use. Pressing the shoot button once will start the cue moving backwards and forwards while pressing it again will play the stroke. The gap in between the two presses determines the strength: if they're close togethera hard shot is played but a longer gap will result in a softer stroke.

The movement of the balls around the table is very smooth and once you've got the hang of calculating the angles it becomes a simple matter to play the game. Real accuracy and large breaks are very tough to achieve, though, with the positional play being as difficult as the real thing. All the rules are implemented – foul shots and being able to ask a player to replay a shot after a foul. There's also a nice replay function allowing you to see the last shot.

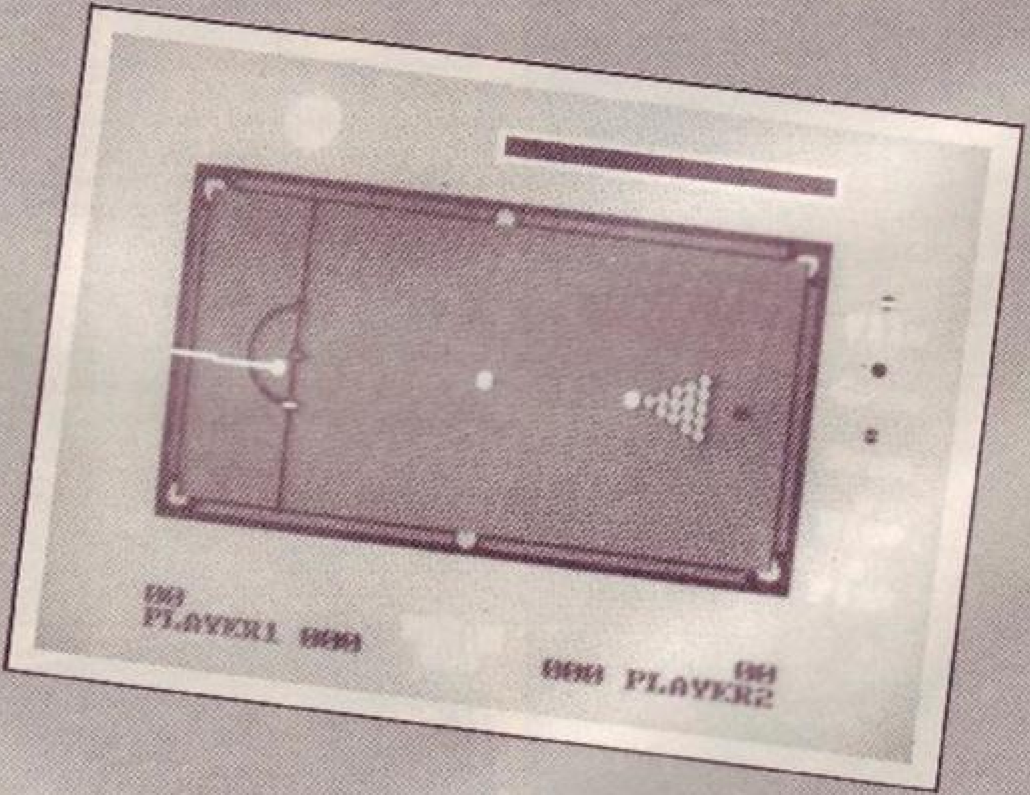
Snooker fans really should have a look at this game because it is very well presented and easy to use, but presents a challenge akin to the real thing. As ever it isn't the best game for converting on to a computer but this is about the best that can be achieved.

BW

GREEN SCREEN VIEW

The odd graphic approach makes this probably the only snooker game playable in mono.

AW



A full 15 reds and everything moves smoothly

G O O D N E W S

- ▶ **Very smooth and fast ball movement.**
- ▶ **Good cue positioning and aiming.**
- ▶ **Superb demo mode – like watching the world championships.**
- ▶ **As near the real thing as you can get on a computer.**

B A D N E W S

- ▶ **Snooker isn't the greatest of computer games.**
- ▶ **Two players only – you can't play against the computer.**

GRAPHICS	67%
SONICS	21%
GRAB FACTOR	64%
STAYING POWER	74%
A A RATING	69%



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Variety is certainly the key word in this highly unusual game which has surely gone far beyond what anyone ever expected.
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LEVEL 9

The Lords of Adventure

Junior pilgrim Pete Connor adventures forth in search of AA readers' favourite adventure game company.

A cold coming I had of it. Through mystic Avalon I struggled, where evil Morgana had laid a thick mist on the land to punish the people for their faith. Through Cheddar's gorge, that deep and fearful chasm, I hurried, muttering the while an ancient incantation learned by The Pilgrim at his mother's breast.

And a powerful strong spell it proved to be – emerging unscathed from the Gorge I climbed the last hill. Morgana's mist had been lifted from the land, the sun burst through to warm my weary bones, the sea's sharp ozone cleared my fuddled brain of it's fear.

There below me, high above the fabled town of Weston-super-Mare, looking out from its hillside across the seas to Wales, was the adventurers' Grail – Rocklease, home of the Lords of Adventure, the mighty Level 9...

Level 9. It's a name that's almost synonomous with adventure. Especially for Amstrad owners – four out of the top 10 adventure games in Amstrad Action's readers charts hail from the company. Titles like *Dungeon Adventure*, *Snowball* and *Red Moon* have won them a loyal following. Yet theirs are games that make few concessions to the keep-it-small-and-simple-and-bung-in-some-pretty-pictures school of adventuring. They believe in a minimum of 200 locations per game, lots of tricky puzzles, and only recently lapsed from the purity of text-only to include graphics.

Although they seem to have been around as long as some of the wizened wizards you're still likely to find skulking in the darker corners of adventures, Level 9 only became a full-time bread-winning company a couple of years ago.

As a hobbyist concern, though, the Level 9 name is first heard back in the misty beginnings of home computing – the early '80s. It was then that Pete Austin produced his first adventure games – on a 16K Nascom, a machine he describes as 'rather like an antique Amstrad'.

These first ventures into adventure programming had been stimulated by Pete's twin interests of computing and fantasy war games. At Cambridge, where he studied Psychology, he was a keen participant in *Dungeons and Dragons* and a member of the War Games Society. But, he says, 'I didn't think you could put this kind of thing in a computer very easily.'

After his first degree he took a Diploma in Computing, at which time he came across the original *Adventure*, the Daddy of them all, running on a mainframe. 'We can do this on a micro', he thought, and did it. The Nascom version of the game sold 300 copies through mail-order and Level 9 was up and running.

The next step was an Adventure Writing System, a step undertaken by Mike Austin – at that time still a schoolboy. The first Level 9 system produced a string of games for the Nascom – *Colossal Adventure, Adventure Quest, Dungeon Adventure*



Pete Austin • Mike Austin • Nick Austin

– which subsequently found their way on to other formats. The last-mentioned, says Pete, 'is still my favourite fantasy-type adventure'.

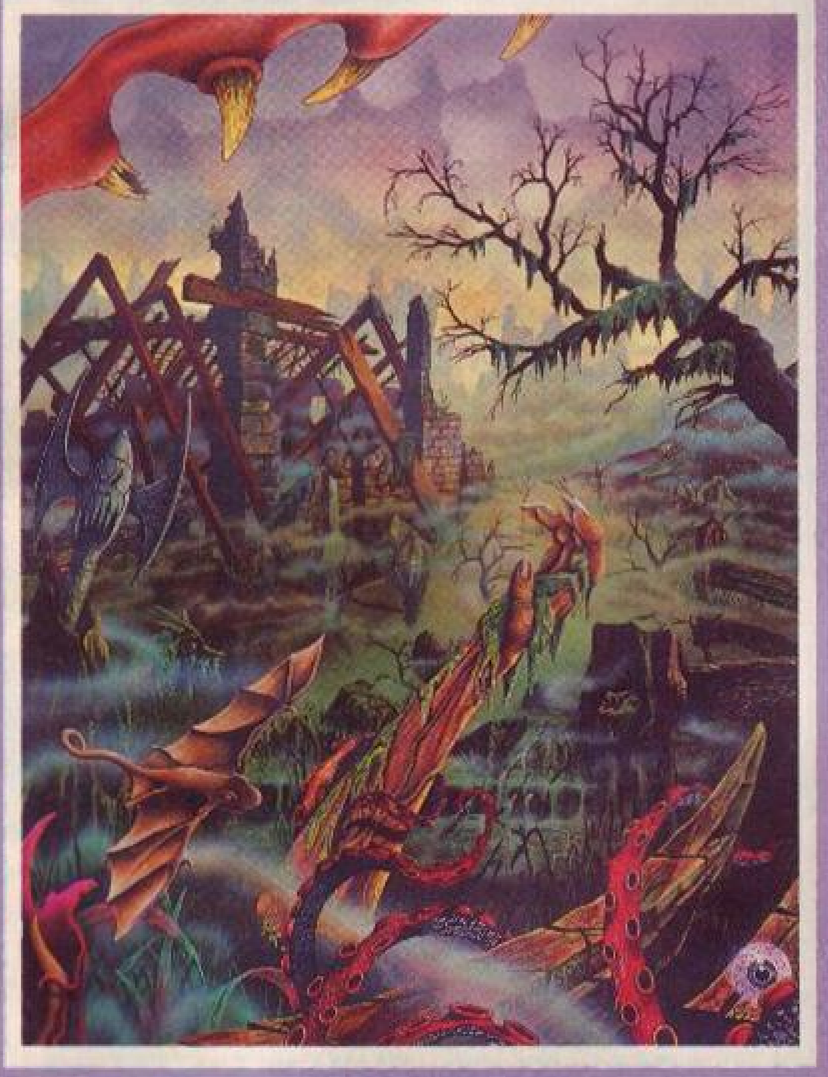
The next big step came with the micro boom, largely a result of the BBC's arrival in 1982. This entailed changing over from the Nascom's Z80 processor to the 6502 chip used in the BBC. It also meant an increase in business, since at the same time distributors began to stock Level 9's games and bring them to a wider public.

By late 1983 Pete had started to work full-time for Level 9, while Mike was taking a year off before university to do the same thing. Margaret, their sister, joined a year later to handle the marketing side and both the Austin parents still lend a hand in the business.

New machines have always seen conversions of the Level 9 range – if their memory was big enough. The Amstrad computers in particular have been very good for Level 9. Now they're even doing PCW8256 versions.

The Price of Magik

The eagerly-awaited sequel to *Red Moon* will make it's appearance on the Amstrad towards the end of this summer. Your task is to rise from mere Sorcerer's Apprentice to Powerful Wizard. The game contains 18 different spells, which can be used – if you can find them – to take on opponents and command creatures. The game also features a much larger vocabularly than previous Level 9 releases – 1000 words.



The Price of Magik – cover artwork

Adrian Mole

The spotty 13 and three-quarters-years-old is the star of a game that lies a little outside the usual Level 9 range. Pete Austin was commissioned to write the game by Mosaic, who had acquired the rights to the book.

Pete designed it as 'a multiple choice game' because 'I didn't see how it could work as a normal adventure.' It certainly worked as he wrote it, not least because he was able to mimic so cleverly the writing style of the books. Even so, Pete is slightly dissatisfied: 'It could have been much better' he says. A sequel is planned for later in the year and will feature much more decision-making.



Adrian Mole – a namby-pamby thicko?

Another, similar, project that didn't get off the ground was a game based on the TV series *Yes, Minister*. Although Pete worked on it for a week, he couldn't find an angle for a game and dropped the option.

He describes himself as someone who's 'very much against extremists' of all political varieties. One day, he adds, he'd like to do 'a game about a viable anarchist society where everyone is good and co-operative and so on.' We'd like to see it.

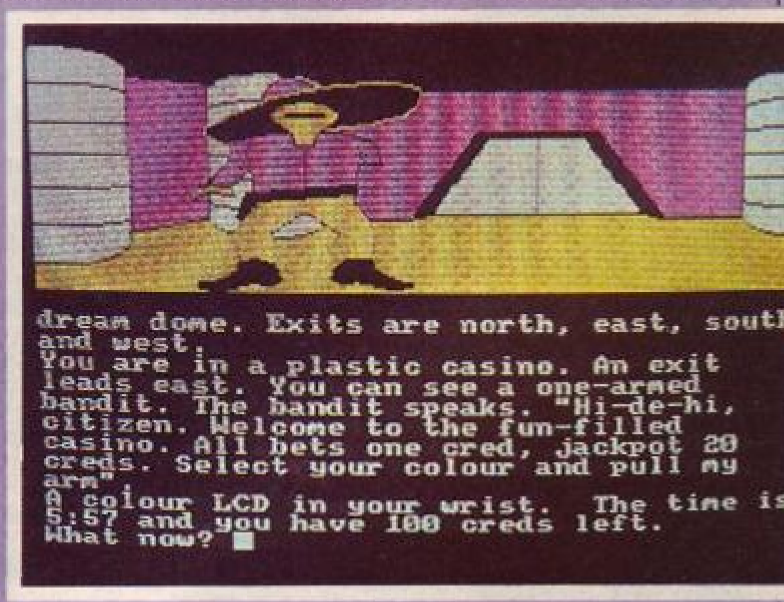
The Silicon Dream trilogy

Level 9's early releases were in the mould of mystic castles, dark forests and slimy orcs. But the appearance of *Snowball* marked the beginning of a trilogy which broke away from the traditional and rather stale *Dungeons and Dragons*-influenced games.

As Pete Austin explains: 'We wanted to do something different. There were a lot of sub-Hobbit adventures about, in which you went round slaying orcs etc. I was afraid the public would get fed up.'

What they came up with reflected the kind of fantasy/sci-fi reading matter that fills Pete's bookshelves. Authors he respects – 'I like the way the worlds are designed', he says – include Larry Niven, David Brin, Sabre Hagen and Robert F. Jones.

So *Snowball*, the first in the trilogy, takes place on a spaceship carrying two million hibernating colonists to the invitingly fertile planet of Eden. It's a game that has many features Pete Austin is very fond of: 'It's the only realistic starship that I know of. It has particle beam engines, which really might work. The passengers are *not* frozen, but kept just above freezing point with their hearts artificially stimulated.'



The Worm in Paradise – Eden's famous one-armed-bandit beckons you into the casino

Snowball was text-only, but

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its sequel *Return to Eden* featured graphics. Here, hero Kim Kimberley is marooned on the deadly paradise of Eden in a game Pete describes as an 'ecological parable'. Kim was christened Kimberley because, says Pete, 'I was living in Bracknell at the time – the second street along was called Kimberley.'

The trilogy was concluded with *The Worm in Paradise*, which featured a new system involving much more sophisticated parsing. It *didn't* feature, though, Kim Kimberley – just an inflatable model of the same which players were tempted to steal from the museum. The system of fines being what it is on Eden, and you having no money, meant that you had to pay with an arm and a leg. Literally.

Avalon

The Arthurian legends are the source of a project – *Avalon* – which excites Pete Austin as much as anything at the moment. It's a huge multi-user game which may be taken on board by British Telecom. And if they don't do it, Level 9 will go it alone and set it up themselves.

The map pinned on Pete Austin's wall gives an idea of the game's size: it's a grid of 100 x 100 squares, which works out at a lot of places to go.

Players of the game, says Pete, will 'wander about gleefully collecting treasures, then take them to the bank and pay them in'. If that sounds rather too much like the everyday struggle for existence, fear not. Wandering around in the same playing area will be old favourites like Arthur, Merlin and that nasty Morgana. Pete says 'I want to have about 1000 computer-generated characters', although some of these will, of course, be fairly simple.

The problems posed by such characters will be exacerbated by the 'incredible number of puzzles' the game will contain – an element Pete feels has been lacking in other multi-user games.

He hopes that players will be able to team up in their efforts. 'I want to combine everything a multi-user system does with a Bulletin Board', he says. So, with a bit of luck, players should be able to meet and leave messages in secret rooms that only those with the password will have access to.

The individual player's aim will not be to defeat any particular character or find any one object, but rather to maximise his personality in whichever direction he chooses to go – rather like the *Dungeons and Dragons* idea.

If BT decide not to take the game Level 9 will set up a network of four or five machines using the 68020 processor. Each one of these is roughly 30 times more powerful than a CPC 464, so many players will be able to take part simultaneously.

The project is still under discussion, although much of the game has already been designed. Look out for *Avalon* later this year.

Interactive games

A criticism sometimes made of Level 9's games is that they do not have anything like the sophisticated artificial intelligence and interaction of, say, the Infocom range – now available for the Amstrads.

Well, first of all, Pete Austin is currently at work on an interactive game to be released probably in autumn. 'It will have "real" characters who wander about', he says. 'You'll be able to talk to them. Lots of things will happen in parallel.'

He's an admirer of some, but by no means all, of the Infocom games and strongly defends Level 9 when comparisons are drawn. Infocom's games, he points out, 'are relatively expensive *and* they're disk only.' Furthermore, while some of them offer truly interactive characters they have relatively few locations: Level 9 games have a minimum of 200 locations.

However, the first interactive Level 9 game is likely to set the trend. If it works on cassette, we shall probably see many more in a similar mould.

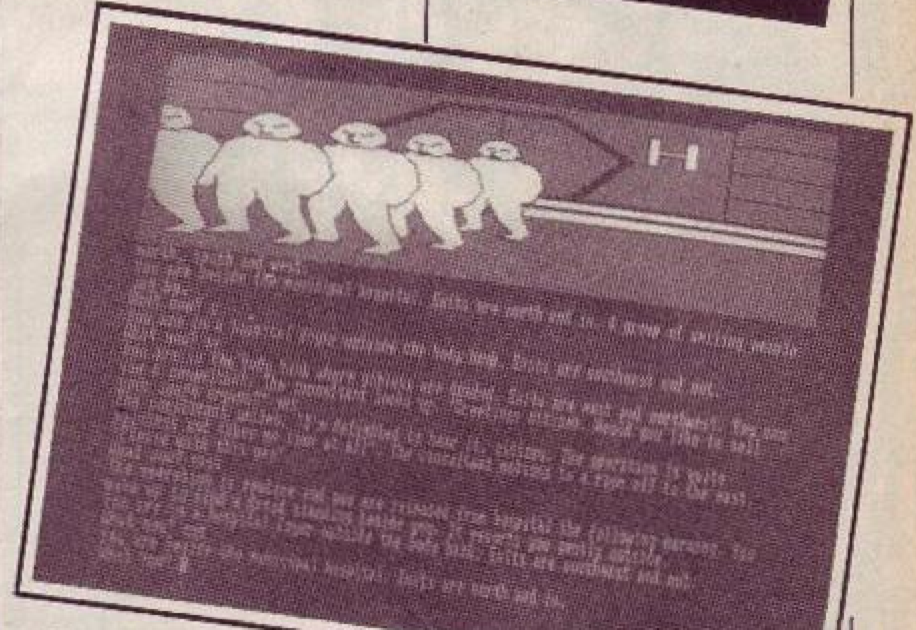
Graphics

Level 9 came to graphic adventures relatively late, and not without a certain reluctance. Now, says Pete, 'I think they really do enhance the game.'

Here again they've come in for a certain amount of criticism. Again, Pete Austin stoutly defends his creations: 'Each Level 9 game has 150-200 pictures. In Interceptor's games, for example, the graphics really slow the game down. They might take 20 or 30 seconds to draw. There's a small number of pictures, the games are small and really pretty poor.'

Lord of the Rings is a game that comes in for some stinging criticism: 'It's a so-called graphic adventure. But there are about four pictures in Part I and I'm not sure if there any in Part II. And then people have the gall to call it a graphic adventure and say they're better than Level 9's.'

It seems he's not very impressed. 'Graphics,' he says, 'will only come into their own on much larger machines. Given the current limitations of memory I think we've got the best compromise.'



PCW8256 version of *The Worm in Paradise*

Pete Austin: Now 30, Pete is the founder of Level 9. Although he still does some programming, his main interest now is in game design.

Nick Austin: 27. Responsible with brother Mike for the various versions of Level 9's adventure writing system. Also programs games.

Mike Austin: 20. Studying Electrical Engineering at Southampton University. Shared in the creation of the adventure writing system, programs games.

Margaret Austin: Deals with Level 9's marketing, distribution, advertising etc.

John and Cora Austin: the parents. Help in mail order, customer services etc.

The Austin six

Level 9 seem to operate the principle of 'keeping it in the family'. The six Austins between them design, program and market their games.

Disks

Amstrad disk-drive owners will be happy to hear that Level 9 are to release disk versions of their games in the very near future. But, due to the current price of disks, they will be not be releasing one game per disk. Instead, two or possibly three games will be included. But the price will definitely be below £20. Sounds like a bargain.

ADVENTURE



All hail to thee, blithe Pilgrims! This month the man with the wooden staff pauses on his journey to bring you a bumper readers' issue, choc-a-bloc with contributions from my fellow travellers. There's also an exclusive review of a new compilation from Global Software, a quick glance at *Cassiopia* from Vidipix, news of the competitions, adventure software charts, and much more from the frantic quill of the Cowled Crusader.

THE LOST PHIRIOUS
Part One: CASSIOPIA
Vidipix

This is the first part of a Quilled Quadrilogy produced by a small cottage-industry software-house called Vidipix. Part II, called *The Planets* will be available in August.

The storyline isn't exactly burning with originality. Set in the far-flung future, news reaches your ears of a valuable space-wreck which, as a space salvage worker, you decide to locate in the hope of making your fortune. The ship, called the Phirious, departed from Earth but was never seen again.

The first part of this four-part bonanza opens on board a ship called Cassiopia, an abandoned hulk that you have decided to investigate on your travels but which has now become your home following the (unexplained) explosion of your own ship. Your task is to escape to Earth to continue with your quest for the Phirious.

I've recounted the plot at some length because I think the problem with this game is that it doesn't have that vital spark of originality that bears evidence of a twisted mind (all good programmers have them) and an enthralling adventure. The game is pretty typical *Quill* fare in its presentation and is text-only. The vocabulary is fairly restricted and, of course, you have to cope with that and *The Quill*'s refusal to specify which word it doesn't understand.

One point in the program's favour – the programmers have very sportingly deprotected the code so that you can transfer it to disc if you wish. They've also taken the unusual step (and one which it would be nice to see repeated) of telling you – via the interesting command MAP – whereabouts you are at the beginning of the game in relation to the rest of the playing area. This enables you to start mapping on the right part of your blank sheet of paper without fear of running over the edge after going WEST ten times in succession! Clever, and thoughtful.

The rest of the game, unfortunately, doesn't seem to bear out this early promise of innovation. The game is split into two stages – first on Cassiopia and then on the moon in an underground mining complex. To get from part one to part two you have to leave the ship, and this is where – to my mind – you get a good example of poor game design. Cassiopia is not a difficult ship to explore and all the objects are either visible or easily discoverable – it only took the Cowled Crusader about twenty-five minutes to persuade this part of the game to yield its secrets. By this stage I was pretty sure that I knew WHAT I had to do – the question was HOW, and since the program greets every incorrect entry with the words 'You can't do that my old goos gog' you can see it's a good thing that in space no-one can hear you scream!

The solution is a bit of a cheat to my mind since it involves fixing a machine that is not actually mentioned directly as being visible, but merely implied by a location description. For example, if you found yourself in 'The control room: there is a broken console here', you would be forgiven, I think, for trying to fix the console. Should the solution turn out to be FIX CONTROL and nothing else is acceptable, I think you'll agree that this is slightly aggravating, and the only challenging bit of the first part of the game is based on this sort of confusion rather than on clever logic or inspired puzzles.

The second part of the game is slightly more challenging – there are just over seventy locations in all so there is a fair bit to explore, but of course the descriptions aren't all that long and the atmosphere reeks of a dozen other space-exploration adventures. At 2.50 this game is of average value, but(despite the budget price) don't expect to give it place of honour – even on the lowest shelf of your collection.

FOURMOST ADVENTURES
Global Software, £7.95 cass

Here's a refreshing approach to marketing adventures by Global Software, who seem to have been much in evidence in this column recently with their imminent release of *Old Scores* by Pete Green.

Fourmost Adventures is endorsed by Tony Bridge of Popular Computing Weekly and The Pilgrim can just about get over his professional pride and say that Mr Bridge would appear to

know a good game when he sees one.

There are four games in the package, which sells for £7.95 on cassette. There'll be a disc-version as well (price unannounced) and at an average of 2.00 each that makes a real bargain – particularly since one of the games is really very good indeed and the collection also includes Wintersoft's excellent *Ring of Darkness*. Let's take a look at each offering in turn...

The Mural

This is a *Quilled* monstrosity that reminded me of some of the earlier Artic games on the Spectrum, but written by someone who appears to have a serious mental problem coupled with a fiendish sense of humour.

Just in case the reputation of Artic leaves you cold, let me explain that Artic had a reputation for producing games that were very difficult to solve. *The Mural* certainly falls into this category and the Pilg was very definitely in need of a clue-sheet at several stages of his endeavours. Luckily I had one to hand – otherwise this review would have been a bit on the short side.

The basic plot (if such is the right word for this collection of improbabilities) of *The Mural* is perfectly straightforward – go forth into the world, find an obscene mural, and paint over it to preserve public decency. The game is Quilled and text-only with a reasonable vocabulary and the location descriptions are lengthy and detailed.

They are also fiendishly difficult to get out of, and for reasons which cannot in the least be considered either logical or – in some cases – comprehensible. For example, go North from the first location and thou shalt never return (at least not without a great deal of difficulty) because a large penguin falls from nowhere and blocks your exit.

Other locations are even worse for your health. Outside a pillar box, located in the middle of a cornfield, you will find, should you foolishly type IN, that for no apparent reason you have shrunk to the size of a mouse, slipped into the box, and been forced to restart the game rather than wait for the Post Office to retrieve you.

Since I had a clue-sheet, I can tell you that there is a way through all these problems, but whether you'll find it or not without such assistance I strongly doubt – at least not without tearing out many handfuls of hair. This may of course be just what you look for in a game, but the Pilg tends to be a bit more of an atmosphere and fantasy man than a fiendish puzzle and outrageous logic fanatic.

In fact, *Mural* reminded me slightly of *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, a truly appaling game that killed you off for no better reason than that you happened to fall foul of a gob-spitting guard or an exploding rabbit – very funny the first time but dull as dishwater after a few hours. *Mural* is of an immeasurably higher standard than that holy tripe, but I still advise you to steer clear of it if you are of a logical disposition.

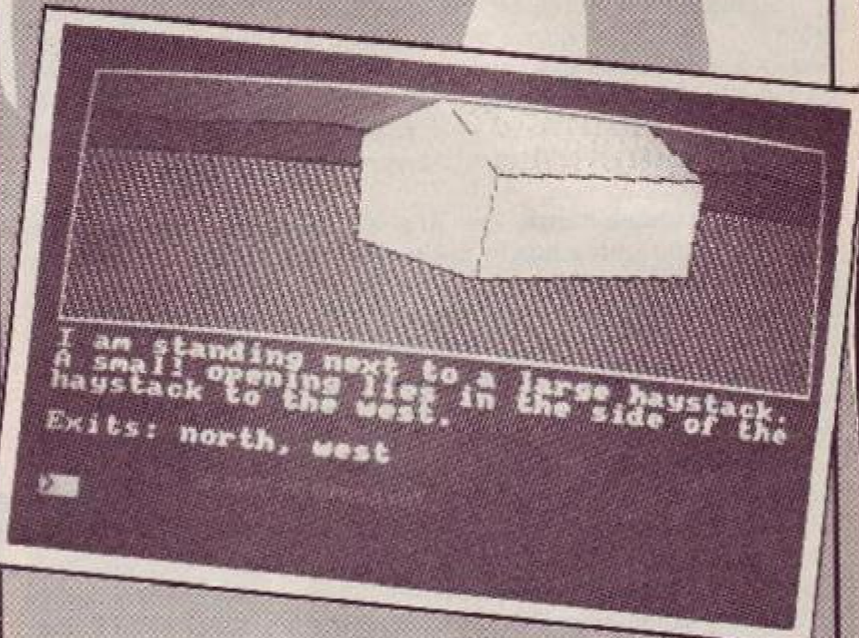
Microman

Now this is something of a rarity, this one. Quilled games can sometimes make you wonder just how much of a good thing it is to have every Tom, Dick, and Harry churning out byte after byte of insipid drivel, but *Microman* is an excellently designed little gem with considerable atmosphere and some very originally conceived locations.

As Prof Neil Richards you have unfortunately been reduced to a mere three inches or so in size, and you must escape from your car (in which this hideous transformation has taken place) and attempt to regain your former stature.

It's a tribute to the game – both its challenge and its atmosphere – that after a few minutes the Pilg really FELT three inches tall. Cynics might say that I'm not much taller than that anyway, but believe me it is a humbling experience to get lost inside a haystack as I did just a few moves after leaving my car.

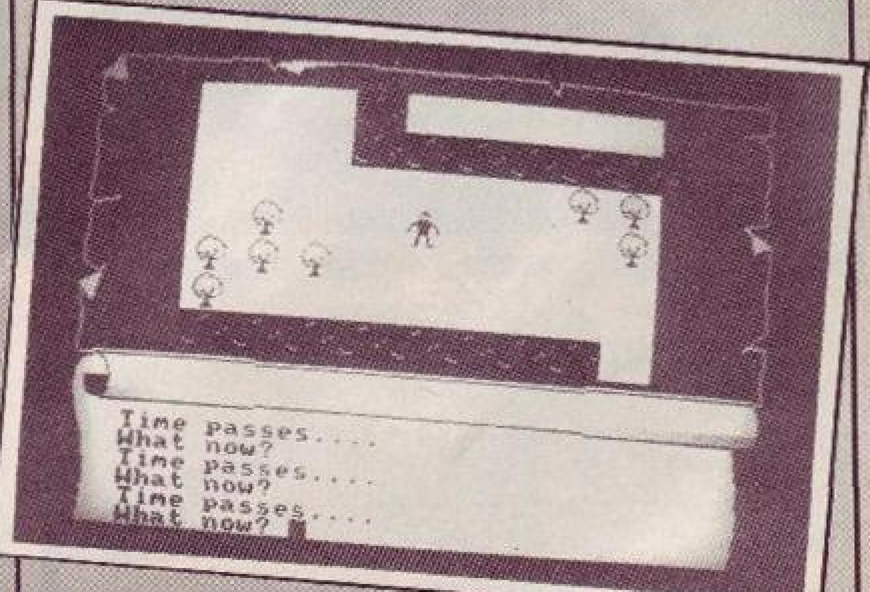
The game is full of nice touches, from the moment you rob a magpie's nest through a life-and-death battle with a mole to your final struggles in the laboratory to solve the conundrum of your much-reduced stature.



To heighten the atmosphere, the game has several attractive graphics. The programmer obviously isn't an artist but his illustrations are tidy, nicely presented, and help give the game just that little bit extra that makes it something special. A game I would thoroughly recommend even if it was being offered on its own – let alone as part of bargain package.

Ring of Darkness

The Pilg has already reviewed this Wintersoft offering. It's one of the few graphics-based role-playing games for the Arnold and is an excellent example of the hit-points and combat-routine genre, though it is quite an ancient offering having originally



appeared on the Dragon computer sometime back in 1901. Suffice it to say that it was well worth the asking price all on its own – and must go a long way to establishing this Global compilation as excellent value for money.

Galaxias

Galaxias is yet another space adventure (as you might guess from the title) but after hearing from Global that it was programmed by the same gent who produced *Bored of The Rings* (something of a classic by Quilled standards) I was prepared for something above the average, even if the scenario didn't look too promising.

I wasn't disappointed either. First, this is an unusually large Quilled game – most Quillers run out of space after about eighty locations but *Galaxias* runs to just over ninety. What's more, the programmer has adopted the sensible design tactic of splitting the game into several component parts, with each set of

locations having its own atmosphere and identity.

Although the notes on the copy I had didn't make it plain what the aim of the game was, I gather that the objective is to retrieve a valuable crystal from a security vault on the planet Zagro. On the way you take in Akrol, Graflon, and Septule, leading you to hope that if ever space exploration really takes off someone will be able to come up with more attractive names for the places they visit.

What puzzles there are are extremely logical, but the strength of the game lies in the design of the map which has a satisfying number of interesting (though not necessarily important) locations to explore. There are also some graphics which while not of the highest standard do make something of a difference – though I wasn unable find the command to redraw them once I'd snapped over to the text-screen to input my commands.

Galaxias suffers slightly in my opinion by belonging to a category of game in which it is very difficult to be both original and of high quality. I'm told that it is in fact quite an old game (though not previously published) and this I can well believe – many of us have a small universe of our own making lying around on tape somewhere and space adventures tend to be the first to suggest themselves to people just starting programming. Nevertheless, it far surpasses the Vidipix game reviewed elsewhere in this issue, and must therefore rate as good value for money when included in a collection like this one.

Conclusion

It's not often that you get four games in one for this sort of price. There's not doubt in my mind that *Mural* is the weakest offering on this tape, but I'm fairly certain that even that game (difficult though it is) will find a few fans. *Ring of Darkness* is obviously a snip at this price, and *Microman* is a very enjoyable discovery. Add all these together, drop in a bit of space exploration, and you've got a package that simply cries out for your cash.

	Atmosphere	Interaction	Challenge	AA-Rating
CASSIOPIA	58%	50%	55%	55%
FOURMOST ADVENTURES				Fourmost Adventures
The Mural	60%	56%	68%	Overall AA-Rating
Microman	70%	56%	65%	(inc. value for money):
Galaxias	63%	56%	67%	85%

To The Pilgrim.

My favourite three adventures are:

1. Game: ______________________

Company: ______________________

2. Game: ______________________

Company: ______________________

3. Game: ______________________

Company: ______________________

My reasons for putting game number one above as first choice are:

If I'm a lucky Pilgrim and win a free game, I should like to receive a copy of:

My address is (BLOCK CAPITALS ONLY):

Red Hot Top Ten!

Oh dear, oh dear! How the mighty are fallen! This month, whether it be the post, the price, or just the bugs, the votes that fell through the Pilg's letterbox quite definitely downrated *Lord of the Rings* from its number one position to a humble number eight in the charts.

Up at number one it's a never-ending success story for Ocean, with a new entry at number two, *Marsport*. The Cowled Crusader isn't quite sure whether to grant this game the status of a traditional adventure, but your votes are obviously determined to settle the issue.

Red Moon at number three is busy vindicating Level 9's decision to return to magic and mystery, while *The Hobbit* just goes to prove that classic adventures never die, they just keep on selling!

Don't forget to keep those votes rolling in – each month you stand a chance to walk away with the game of your choice, so don't delay - vote TODAY!

1. Never Ending Story	**Ocean**
2. Marsport	**Gargoyle**
3. Red Moon	**Level 9**
4. The Hobbit	**Melbourne House**
5. Forest at World's End	**Interceptor**
6. Return to Eden	**Level 9**
7. Lord of the Rings	**Melbourne House**
8. Snowball	**Level 9**
8. Message from Andromeda	**Interceptor**
10. Hitchiker's Guide	**Infocom**

This month's winner...

Tony Brown of Newport heads for the finishing line this month with a free copy of *Souls of Darkon*. Your prize, Tony, is busy sprouting wings and despite Taskset's sad demise I can assure you that it is currently preparing to take to the skies and land in your letterbox.

Tony's favourite games were *Adventure Quest, Fantasia Diamond, and Heroes of Karn* – a sound choice if ever I saw one. Hope you enjoy *Darkon*, Tony – and hang on to it, there aren't many copies about.

Clue Sniffing With the Pilgrim

Here they are, my fellow pilgs, another collection of timely tips to help you out of whatever dilemma you may be in. Keep a straight staff, and when in doubt reach for the Cowled Crusader's column, where the Lords of Adventure will do their best to help you.

FANTASIA DIAMOND
The TV and the Chair are red herrings – get on with something else.

WARLORD (thanks to Paul Mackenzie)
Jump out at Lug's Cavern

MINDSHADOW
NNENEESSE – just the trick for a change of scene.
Strike a light! Help's on its way.

ROBIN OF SHERWOOD
Hitch a lift into the castle.
Dead satanists have a lot to offer.

NEVER ENDING STORY
Has the penny dropped yet? It has to if you need the key.
An apple a day does wonders for Widow's Revenge.

ZORK 1
Don't sit on the egg! And don't stash one away either.
Yellow buttons turn bolts.

Contact the Pilg!

You can contact the Pilg on Prestel/Micronet 919994854 or BT Gold 83:JNL251. Please note that the Cowled Crusader cannot answer individual cries for help, but he is always interested to hear from adventurers on all aspects of adventuring.

PILGRIMS POST

Boy oh boy, the Post Office must bless the day all you Pilgrims first picked up a pen and licked a stamp – there were so many letters this month that it took the Pilg nearly two hours just to open them, let alone read the contents. Here goes with those we've got room for...

First, Mr John Keneally of Camel Micros. The name may well ring a bell, and sure enough the epistle is on the subject of *Genesis*, the adventure generator that the Pilg was rather rude about a couple of issues back. 'Having settled down on Sunday with AA in one hand and a good pint of scrumpy in the other', writes John, 'I noticed your comments on my last letter re *Genesis*...' (Hmmm..Hope you managed to grab a good swig of the scrumpy, John). 'The point I was trying to make,' he continues, 'was about the balance of the review you wrote. It is discouraging to have attempts to improve the capability of games designers dismissed so easily, and many users might rate it at least equal on grounds of ease of use. 'Swervins' comments that you printed last month illustrate the point. With 50 locations and 4 exits, you need 200 links anyway. Whether motion is done by fixed links built into locations or by action commands is a choice to be made in designing the games designer.

'From a programming viewpoint fixed links are easier, but if during the game you want to, say, change the location which is north of a given place, this is impossible if fixed links are used. *Genesis* makes it possible to write games in which new locations can appear during the game, old ones can disappear or change, and so on. This has been the design approach throughout, though one that is not easily appreciated until you want to do a game problem that others cannot reach! We don't regard this as 'ridiculous' but essential.'

Point taken, John. I do appreciate that in producing *Genesis* you were trying to design a system that was as flexible as possible. I don't deny that at the price (and I made this point in my first review), *Genesis* is in viable competition with *GAC* and *The Quill/Illustrator* for those prepared to make a little more effort. However, this philosophy of flexibility can be taken too far and some compromise has to be made. For example, the most flexible adventure generator program I know of is Hi-Soft's assembler *Devpac*...Get my point? Hitting the right middle note is difficult and I felt (and still do) that *Genesis* was too low-level for most people. And then there was the problem with the documentation, which was extremely obscure in parts. Anyway, what this all goes to show is that if you think you can handle the complexity, and can't be bothered to write your own system, then give *Genesis* a second look before passing on to *GAC* or *The Quill*.

John also mentions a new adventure club: 'intended mainly to provide an outlet for games written by members (using any means, even steam BASIC!). There will also be a monthly newsletter and helpline, and games can be offered for sale free in the newsletter. Members will also be able to purchase any Camel Adventure at a reduced price.'

'I have just bought *Hitchiker's Guide* but I am stuck over the babel fish' wails Roger Wilson of Blackburn. This babel fish is certainly causing a lot of problems, but the Pilg feels that perhaps he should point out that you don't actually NEED the babel fish in *HHTTG*. In fact, bearing in mind the Vogon captain's poetry, perhaps you don't want it either!

A. Morris of Manchester is obviously in dire straits. 'I am so worried that I think I may be driven into buying a Spectrum!' he confesses. Heavens forbid, Mr Morris, that you should be reduced to such desperate remedies, especially since I am sure that there are many other adventurers around who can help you out. The game in question is *Message from Andromeda*, and Mr Morris is well and truly stuck. Bail him out please, someone – his address is in the Lords of Adventure column, and although I don't normally pass on cries for help (that's what the



Lords are for) this Spectrum sickness obviously demands immediate action.

Now for this month's Moan. Melbourne House come under fire again for the bugs in *Lord of the Rings*, and in this case it's Chris Reynolds of North Ferriby pulling the trigger:

'Seldom have I been moved to write any letter to a publication, but the time has come when I feel that I must. I have recently become £16.00 poorer after purchasing the Melbourne House 'Adventure' *Lord of the Rings* and having attempted to play it several times, I have been reduced to little more than a quivering snarling animal. Quite how I have managed to restrain myself from punching out my monitor, I do not know, and each time I play it, I invariably become so frustrated that I end up commanding myself to kill myself for the sole satisfaction of having someone actually obey one of my commands.

Tell me, are these 'bugs' an integral part of all adventure games, or do the programmers just write them in to make our lives more interesting and more challenging? What I would also like to know is how Melbourne House can justify such a high price for a game which seems to me to be virtually unplayable, at least not with any degree of enjoyment.

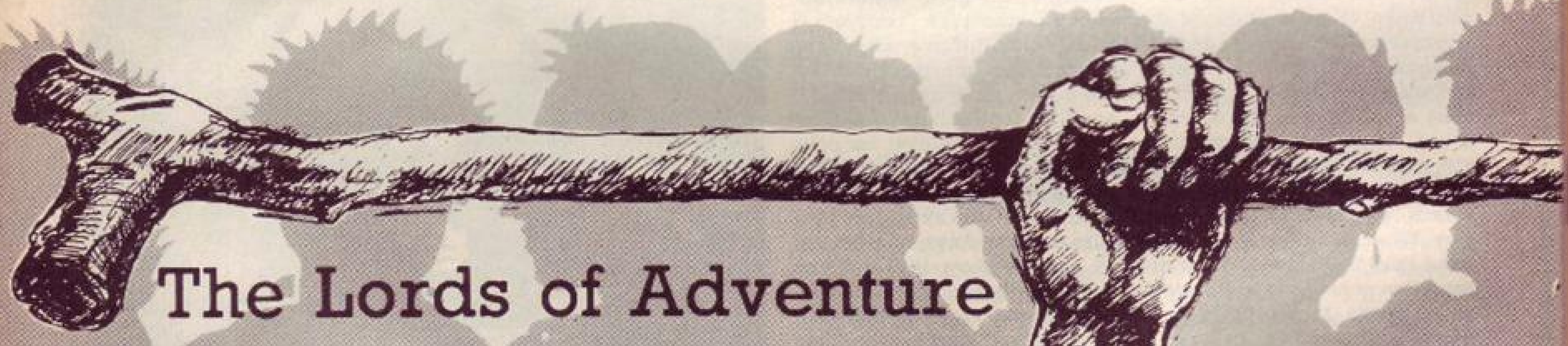
I wish I had never bought this game, but more than that, I wish that Melbourne House had approached this project differently, and thereby perhaps done justice to what could, I am sure, be one of the greatest adventures of all. Anyone want my copy while I go and look for *The Worm in Paradise*?'

Ah well, I hope you feel better after your moan, Mr Reynolds. Bugs can indeed cause one to tear one's hair out (as anyone who knows the Pilg's hair-loss problems will testify), but I think you're being a bit harsh on Melbourne House. I quite enjoyed *LOR* but I have to admit that that enjoyment only came once I'd learnt what commands to avoid for fear of the program falling over.

Finally, a quick point from Mrs Grace Morris of Tyldesley. 'Halfway through *Ring of Darkness* we upgraded our Amstrad and – yes, you guessed (I didn't), the program won't work on the 6128. Please can anyone help us?'. I haven't heard of other people having this problem, so perhaps they've found a way round it – I wasn't able to get hold of Wintersoft, so anyone with a tip on this one (or on any other 'misbehaved' adventure software) drop the Pilg a line – or write to Mrs Morris at 5 Esthwaite Drive, M29 7EQ if you can help her.

That's all we've got room for this month. Keep the letters coming, and the Cowled Crusader gives you his word that he'll read them and, whenever possible, print them here. It gives me tremendous pleasure to hear from you all, but do please remember that I cannot answer individual cries for help – that's what the Lords are for, so use them well and spare the Pilg!





The Lords of Adventure

'Ere they be, fellow Pilgs! The cream of the world's Crusaders, with lamps in hand, swords at the ready, and gold in their pockets to help you out of the trickiest locations in the world of adventures. If it's help you need, these are the Matchless Ones who shall lead you forth from dungeons dark and caverns calamitous – but don't forget to include an SAE!

My sincere apologies to the Pancotts, whose 'phone number was previously incorrectly printed. The correct number is printed below and the Pilg grovels for forgiveness from all those who have been inconvenienced. Since the Pancotts first appeared in the magazine I feel sure that they have solved a good deal more games – I don't have a list but I'm sure they will fill you in if you need assistance.

Jewels of Babylon, Heroes of Karn, Forest at the Worlds End
A Morris, 59 Woodbridge Road, Flixton, Manchester, M31 2RD

Mordons Quest, Classic Adventure and others
Timothy Gurney, 10 Garwyn Avenue, Roundwood, Meliden, Prestatyn, Clwyd, LL19 8LR

Emerald Isle, The Hobbit, Gems of Stradus, Return to Eden, Ring of Darkness and others
P.M. and J.G. Pancott, 78 Radipole Lane, Weymouth, Dorset, DT4 9RS Tel: 0305 784155

Dungeon Adventure, Adventure Quest, All Interceptor games, All Nemesis games, Fantasia Diamond, Robin of Sherwood
Tony Brown, 120 Darent Walk, Bettws Estate, Newport, Gwent, NP9 6SN

Warlord, Jewels of Babylon
Paul Mackenzie, 29 Millersneuk Avenue, Lenzie, G66 5HP

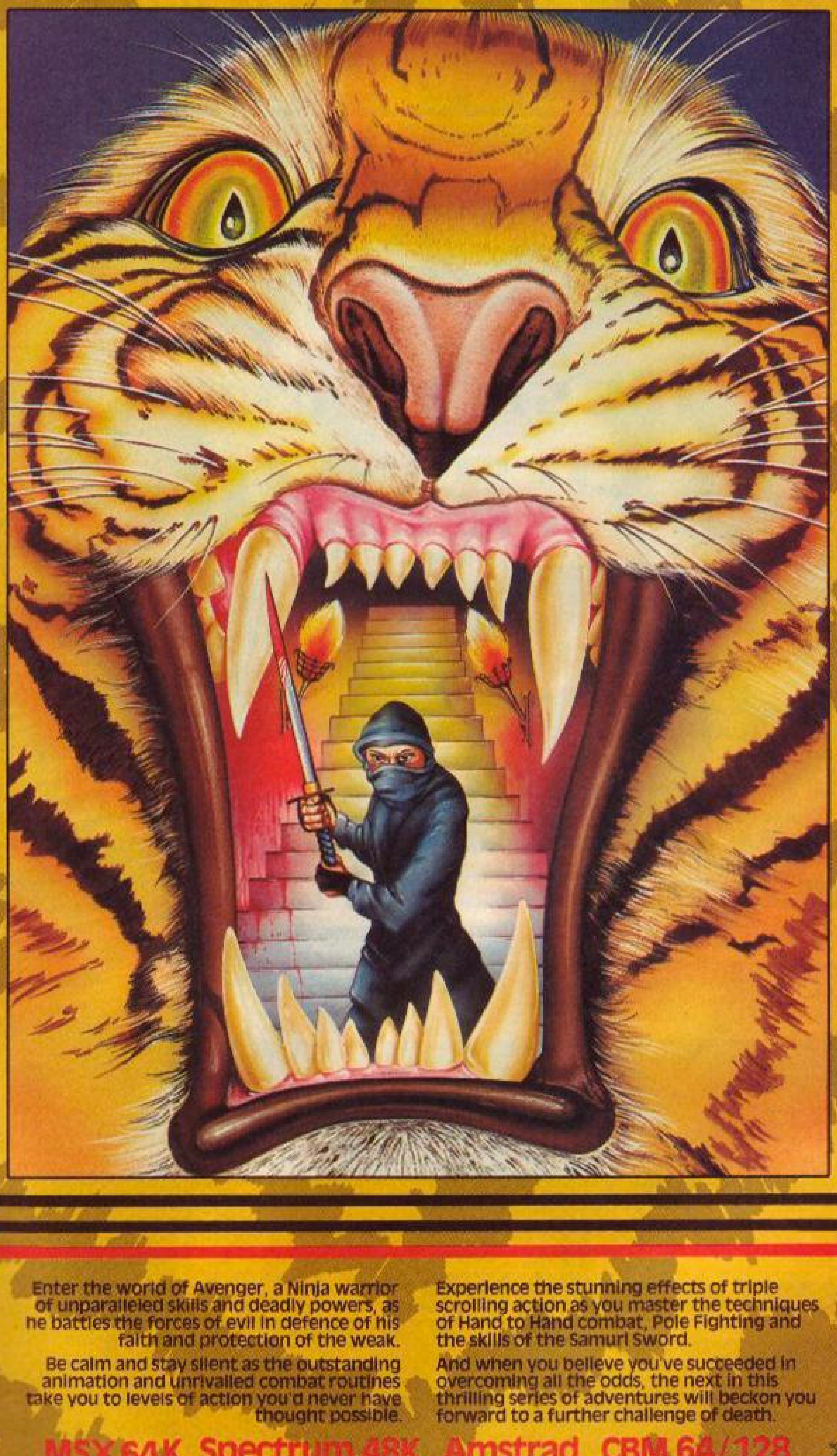
Hobbit, Forest at Worlds End, Message from Andromeda
Declan O'Byrne, 8A Woodlands, Naas, Co Kildare, Eire

Mordons Quest, Jewels of Babylon, Forest at the Worlds End,Smugglers Cove, Message from Andromeda
Mrs Shirley Wall, 38 Glebelands, Westfield, Radstock, Bath, Avon, BA31 3SU

Hobbit, Subsunk, Message from Andromeda, Red Moon, Worm in Paradise, Wise & Fool of Arnold Blackwpood, Brawn Free, Trial of Arnold Blackwood, Gremlins
Mrs Pat Winstanley, 13 Hollington Way, Wigan, WN3 6LS

All games
Tony Treadwell, 17 Headley Way, Headington, Oxford, OX3 0LR
Tel: (0865) 68637

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THE RAMJAM CORPORATION

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Hi Score

We're reprinting the criteria for scores on some games this month as a guide just in case you missed them last month. Hot games to get cracking on are *Get Dexter, Batman, Frankie* and *Thing on a Spring*.
Boulderdash: level reached rather than score.
Bruce Lee: score for destroying the wizard once.
DT's Supertest: combined scores for days one and two played through once only.
Ghostbusters: scores for one game achieved from the $10,000 account limit.
3D Starstrike: highest score for one pass through all stages at any level.
Super Pipeline II: highest score after completing 16 screens.
Tau Ceti: rods collected.
Way of the Exploding Fist: highest score after defeating two opponents on tenth dan.
Yie Ar Kung Fu: highest score for defeating first eight opponents.

Mini Challenges

Score challenged: all *Dark Star* scores.
Challenger and reason: Mark Smith. Any score is possible by taking away the enemy missiles.

Score challenged: 543,780 on *Devil's Crown* by Jeremy Nargi.
Challenger and reason: Michael Clayton. Would have to be 7-8 complete games. I can't find object to complete game.

Score challenged: 54,840 on *Blagger* by Alisdair Carnie.
Challenger and reason: Paul Stagg. Minimum score increment is 25.

Ahhh!
72,420 Lee Healy, Walsall.
38,140 Dene Graber, Bedford.
28,290 Shahan Saier, East Ham.

Airwolf
1,703 Mark Dewey, Hoddesdon.
1,342 Steven Walden, Cheltenham.
1,172 Khin Wan Lai, Hull.

Alien Break-In
337,400 Iain McKinnon, Glasgow.
292,164 Paul Mackenzie, Lenzie.
290,680 Graeme Taylor, East Kilbride.

Amsgolf
51 shots Daniel Elkington, Solihull.
51 shots Mark Lampon, Ilford.
52 shots Brent Glover, Gravesend.

Android One
17,680 David Litherland, Bolton.

Android Two
36,480 Stephen Raggett, Westbourne Park.
9,720 Paul Rushton, Market Drayton.

Battle Beyond the Stars
14,000 Helge Borchsenius, Nittedal, Norway.
9,450 David Finlayson, Dundee.
9,450 Deborah Harris, Seaham.

Beach Head
124,000 Richard Ormson, Bury.
123,000 Laurance East, Cranham.
122,100 Jeremy Nargi, Hove.

Blagger
50,125 Paul Stagg, Rickmansworth.
49,975 Alain Salesse, Farnborough.
49,025 Matthew Chester, Louth.

Bounty Bob Strikes Back
216,129 Ronnie Agnew, Liverpool.
54,000 Peter Day, Birmingham.
34,410 Alex Gough, Hastings.

Brian Bloodaxe
13,820 Stewart McCone, Pontefract.

Brian Jacks Superstar Challenge
4,789 George Reaves, Bradford.
4,126 Thomas Tofield, Ashford.
3,636 George Reaves, Bradford.

Cauldron
70,750 Ralph Turner, Newport.
55,900 Karen Brett, Folkestone.
55,550 John Clark, Anstruther.

Chiller
8,700 Ian Grainger, Wingate.
7,900 Lloyd Butler, Birmingham.
7,200 Justin Leahy, Eltham.

Chimera
5,205 GM Gatter, London.
5,077 Richard Pemberton, Charlton.
4,807 Helen Smith-Gosling, Haverford West.

Chuckie Egg
574,170 (Level 40) Alan Steele, Didcot.
572,580 (Level 40) Carl Mollart.
535,400 A Grimshaw, Blackburn.

Codename Mat 1
1,106 George Reaves, Bradford.
1,106 Michael Dunse, Bonnyrigg.
1.090 Eric Henry, Drogheda.

Codename Mat II
52,100 Kelvin Clarke, Telford.
27,150 Eric Henry, Drogheda.
23,960 Christopher Hardy, Weymouth.

Combat Lynx
910,300 Owen McGarvey, Glasgow.
500,000 Karsten Jensen, Aalborg, Denmark.
176,850 Alan Stenson, Catterick Garrison.

Confuzion
590,005 (Level 66) Lamaan Ball, Cowley.
147,145 (Level 31) Duncan Ellis, Ilkley.
126,775 Jason Grandin, Penylan.

Covenant
19,120 Stewart Eves, Isleworth.
4,964 David Hodgson, Bradford.
3,040 Roy Williams, London.

Daley Thompson's Decathlon (One day)
148,760 Tim Gurney, Prestatyn.
142,780 Scott Dixon, North Shields.
141,710 JP Gorman, Edmonton.

Death Wake
173,102 Jonathan West, Romford.

Defend or Die
4,340,000 Simon Sutton, Cheltenham.
2,571,925 Paul Hyett, Cheltenham.
2,033,650 Jonathan Stewart, Dundee.

Devil's Crown
42,200 G Smith, Sheffield.
40,610 RM Thompson, Grangemouth.
38,730 MA Clayton, Blackpool.

Don't Panic
12,000 Kathryn Collin, Dunfermline.
8,150 D Collin, Dunfermline.
650 Adrian Sill, Doncaster.

Dynamite Dan
1,511 Lawrence Smith, Newport.
1,262 Lee McMahon, Manchester.
925 John Clark, Anstruther.

Electro Freddy
4,035 Alvin Thompson, Hebburn.
3,410 Thomas Tofield, Ashford.
2,750 Simon Dooley, Bolton.

Er*Bert
126,850 Richard Denton, Torquay.
111,000 Lawrence Smith, Newport.
76,300 Julian Cater, East Sheen.

Everyone's a Wally
3,000 A Grimshaw, Blackburn.
2,130 Paul Bennett, Rhondda.
1,700 Antony Critchley, Bracknell.

Fighting Warrior
147,940 Paul Stagg, Grantham.
98,800 Michael Clark, Midlothian.
97,370 David Cobane, Manchester.

Fireant
39,600 Gary Brickley, Fife.
33,300 G Veazey, Peacehaven.
30,200 Mark Burford, Leamington Spa.

Fruity Frank
40,600 Alvin Thompson, Hebburn.
36,010 Andy Keeble, Bromley.
25,210 Andrew Heuze, Radcliffe.

Galactic Plague
205,900 Karen Brett, Folkestone.
193,310 Steven Walden, Cheltenham.
121,840 Neil Stevens, Maidstone.

Gauntlet
201,500 Jonathan Shaw, Liskeard.
25,220 Andrew Matko, Glasgow.
18,610 David Schofield, Retford.

Ghouls
8,160 Christoper Devlin, St. Helens.
8,100 Simon Withers, Surrey.
7,090 Paul Stagg, Rickmansworth.

Gilligan's Gold
623,931 David Finlayson, Dundee.
598,100 Michael Clark, Midlothian.
501,750 Ian Leitch, Blandford.

3D Grand Prix
9,738 David Vincent, Hernbay.
9,292 Duncan Watt, Aldershot.
8,750 Christopher Hardy, Weymouth.

Grand Prix Rally II
83,184 David Dumigan, Lytham.
72,464 Geoff Kerslake, Woodham Ferrers.
70,690 FJ Griffiths, Birkenhead.

Gyroscope
34,400 Simon Dennis, Ilkley.
28,610 Lee McMahon, Manchester.
21,330 Nicholas White, Plymouth.

Harrier Attack
770,450 Graham Ross, Devizes.
599,870 Mike Drury, Swinton.
517,050 Darrel Fletcher, Gosport.

Haunted Hedges
299,470 C Johnson, Sutton Coldfield.
112,870 Paul Stagg, Grantham.
33,080 Steven Playle, Braintree.

Highway Encounter
242,100 Stephen Raggett, Westbourne Park.
148,370 RG Messenger, Perth.
116,720 J Jefferies, Chippenham.

Hunchback
1,508,000 Michael Clark, Midlothian.
1,206,000 Daryl Ward, Leicester.
1,200,000 Jason Dixon, Selby.

Hunchback II
9,000 Jason Carpenter,
6,250 Steven McDougall, Aberdeen.
6,250 William Gattrell, Bangor.

Hypersports
117,598 Ralph Turner, Newport.
91,475 George Reaves, Bradford.
80,015 Martin Paterson, Glasgow.

Jet Boot Jack
258,900 David Finlayson, Dundee.
160,325 Lee Healy, Walsall.
133,175 Alison Hall, Ashford.

Juggernaut
48,900 Eric Henry, Drogheda.
9,500 Michael Speers, Donaghadee.

Killer Gorilla
375,000 Adrian McGivern, Dorchester.
345,400 Christoper Devlin, St. Helens.
175,900 Matthew Truman, Bath.

Kong Strikes Back
648,600 Lawrence Smith, Newport.
646,300 Mark Brayshaw, Leeds.
535,600 C Johnson, Sutton Coldfield.

Kung Fu
792 Khin Wan Lai, Hull.
698 Stuart Hutchinson, Reading.
690 Adrian McGivern, Dorchester.

Laserwarp
368,730 Denis Condren, Filey.
207,000 Michael Wilkes, Stourbridge.
198,860 T Grogan, Blackburn.

Locomotion
8,401 Mike Drury, Swinton.
5,338 Christoper Eng, London.
2,558 Michael Downie, Dalston.



Minder
£24,364 George Reaves, Bradford.
£22,096 Mark Tozer, Canvey Island.
£18,655 Robert Tozer, Canvey Island.

Moon Buggy
159,100 Lawrence Smith, Newport.
110,930 Patrick Grant, Coventry.
89,500 Robert Frost, Earls Barton.

Mr Freeze
16,870 Stuart Hutchinson, Reading.
16,240 Peter Wright, Stourport.
13,870 Jamie Thomson, Leighton Buzzard.

Mutant Monty
48,150 Marcus Passant, Perton.
44,950 A Wagstaffe, Whitchurch.
43,180 Alastair Kerr, Plymouth.

Nightshade
1,222,000 Julian Bunn, Newport.
943,120 Ralph Turner, Newport.
589,000 A Hill, Bramhall.

Number One
1,222 Jonathan Scott, Longridge.
818 Nicholas White, Plymouth.
697 Tim Gurney, Prestatyn.

One Man and his Droid
7,226 Ian Leitch, Blandford.
3,086 Mark Lawrence, Brighton.
2,658 Brad Howarth, Saltford.

On the Run
74,110 Daniel Singerman, Southampton.
74,060 Patrick McCorry, Belfast.
60,000 Ranjit Singh, Queen's Park.

Pinball Wizard
31,775 Roger Wilson, Blackburn.
29,550 Paul Smith, Huddersfield.
25,445 Stuart Russell, East Kilbride.

Punchy
1,132,320 Mark Salt, Irlam.
235,990 Alan Jackson, Wolverhampton.
70,130 Richard Denton, Torquay.

Raid
1,249,400 Alan Watson, Inverness.
1,117,200 Alan Stenson, Catterick.
820,820 Peter Brady, Pontefract.

Rambo
18,350 Adrian Greenway, Blackheath.
15,220 Adrian Sill, Doncaster.

Rock Raid
32,780 Stephen Gray, Bath.
30,640 Shafqat Rasul, Alloa.

Roland Ahoy!
6,270 Peter Bisson, Leyland.
6,265 Alastair Budd, Lincoln.
5,140 Mark Blakemore, Liverpool.

Roland goes Digging
£1,710.38 Adrian Johnston, Shrewsbury.
£454.54 Steven Salway, Burnham-on-sea.
£335.55 Craig Thomson, Eyemouth.

Roland on the Ropes
2,500,900 Tim Gurney, Prestatyn.
2,000,750 Adrian Johnston, Shrewsbury.
1,450,700 Harvey Case, Orpington.

Sabre Wulf
391,020 Paul Simpson, London.
307,310 Paul Stagg, Cheltenham.
237,050 Simon Whitehouse, Storrington.

Skyfox
38,500 Richard Craven, Ilkley.
37,500 Mark Thould, Canterbury.
37,500 Gerry Hughes, Cranleigh.

Sorcery
Lots of people over 97,000

Sorcery Plus
153,450 Joanne Sturton, Orpington.
138,049 Alison Stevenson, Wildenrath.
137,806 Simon Keen, Camberley.

Spannerman
100,900 David Finlayson, Dundee.
84,900 Andrew Brooks, Warrington.
84,100 Ian Finnerty, Roscommon.

Splat
22,535 David Cobane, Wythenshawe.
13,210 Roy Williams, London.

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16,810 Christoper Eng, London.
16,220 David Rice, Glasgow.

Starion
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32,416 Robert Barclay, Desborough.

Strangeloop
12,200 Lamaan Ball, Cowley.
10,223 Brad Howarth, Saltford.
10,065 Patrick Hanna, Birchington.

Supersleuth
20,300 Donald Sharkey, Scunthorpe.

Survivor
367,500 Paul Edwards, Stevenage.
302,800 Eddie Filkins, Runcorn.
241,100 Scott Brown, Cumbernauld.

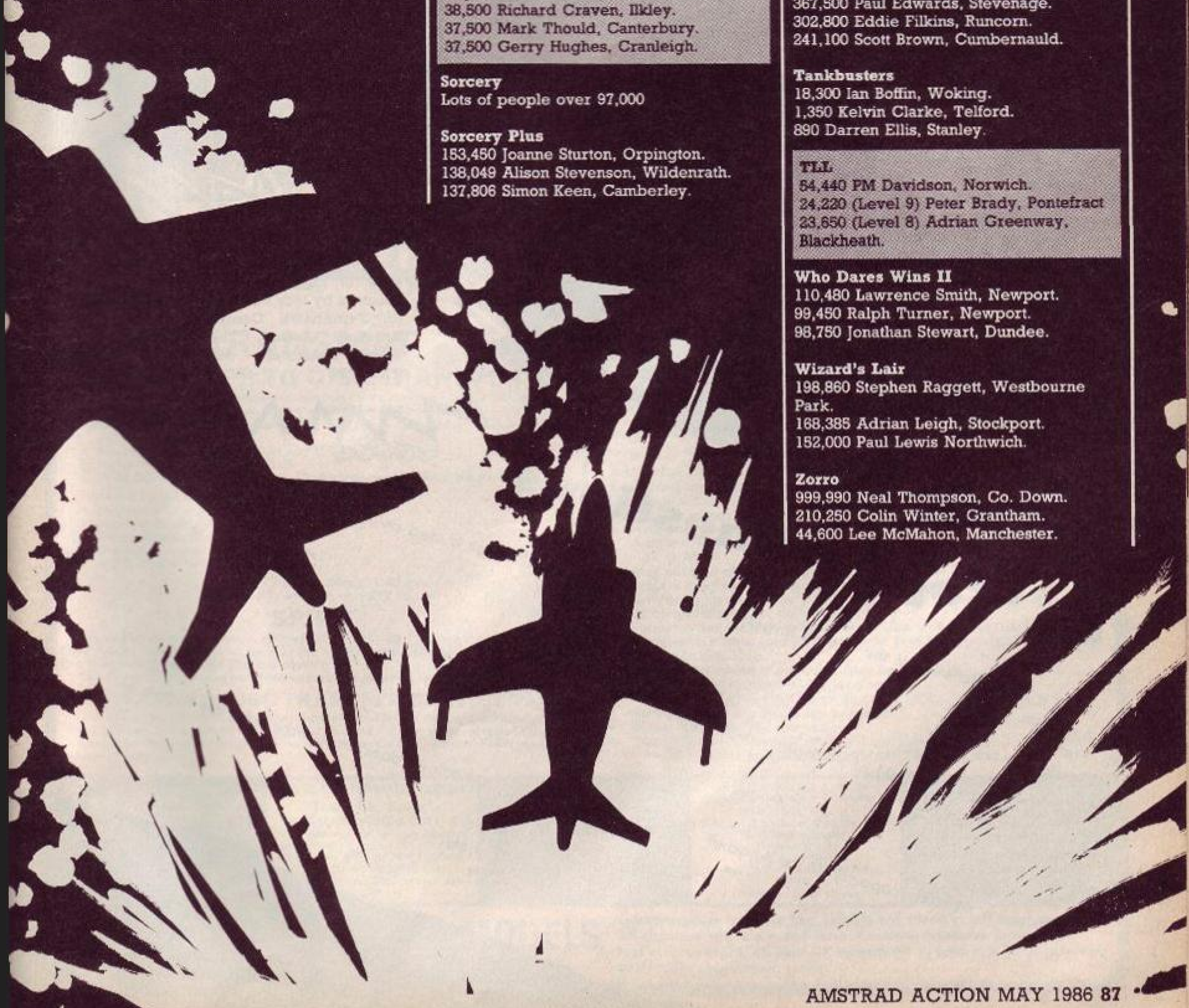
Tankbusters
18,300 Ian Boffin, Woking.
1,350 Kelvin Clarke, Telford.
890 Darren Ellis, Stanley.

TLL
54,440 PM Davidson, Norwich.
24,220 (Level 9) Peter Brady, Pontefract
23,650 (Level 8) Adrian Greenway, Blackheath.

Who Dares Wins II
110,480 Lawrence Smith, Newport.
99,450 Ralph Turner, Newport.
98,750 Jonathan Stewart, Dundee.

Wizard's Lair
198,860 Stephen Raggett, Westbourne Park.
168,385 Adrian Leigh, Stockport.
152,000 Paul Lewis Northwich.

Zorro
999,990 Neal Thompson, Co. Down.
210,250 Colin Winter, Grantham.
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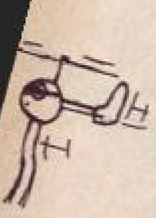


Answers – on a postcard or the back of an envelope – must reach us by May 8th. Send them to: **Tomahawk Competition, Amstrad Action, The Old Barn, Somerton, Somerset TA11 7PS**

The 'Copter Questions

1. What is the nationality of the world's largest helicopter?
a. American
b. French
c. Russian

2. When was the first flight of the Apache helicopter?
a. 1965
b. 1985
c. 1975



3. What is the crew capacity of the Apache?
a. 1
b. 2
c. 3

4. Which helicopter is used by the RAF for Air-Sea rescue?
a. Wessex
b. Gazelle
c. Apache

5. Who wrote *Tomahawk*?
a. R. Swift
b. C. Boswell
c. D. Marshall

6. What technology does an Apache pilot use to see at night?
a. Infra-red
b. Ultra-violet
c. Carrots

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Graphics Bonanza

These pretty type-ins will show just what Arnold can do when he sets his mind to it.

This month's type-'em-ins are all fast, smooth animation programs . What's more, they all get their amazing speed the same way – colour-switching. If you just want to dazzle your friends with Arnold's graphic abilities then get typing. If you're a Basic buff and keen to write colour-switching classics of your own, on the other hand, then read on to see how it's done.

What follows assumes a fair bit of graphics knowledge, especially about inks and colours. If you're not too hot on these, take a look at our new series on Basic programming – otherwise, read on.

If you want to change the colour of a point on the screen, you can do it in two ways. The normal method is to change the **ink** at the point – this is the way that graphic commands like PLOT and DRAW work. In a typical animation sequence, you'll need to make many thousands of these changes every second – more than Basic can handle – so this plot/draw method isn't going to be fast enough.

A quicker but more drastic way is to alter the **colour** in which the ink at the point is displayed, using an INK command. The problem is, this method also changes the apparent colour of every other point drawn in that ink. This is the power of colour switching – even in mode 0, it takes just sixteen commands to change the colour of every point on the screen.

Colour switching doesn't change any of the shapes on the screen – straight lines in the two mini-listings and curves in *Rotating Spheres* – but it can still give the impression of movement by changing their colours. In the two mini-listings, the general pattern is moved by assigning colours to the inks in rotation – the individual lines, after the initial drawing period, stay exactly where they are.

Rotating Spheres has a slightly different approach. Once the lines and curves have been drawn, the inks are all switched to black except the sphere-outline ink and one other – these are switched to bright white. Thus you have only the sphere outline and one set of curves/background lines visible. This set of curves and lines is then switched to black, and the next set to white – and so on, in an endless loop, until a key is pressed.

All three programs use mode 0, to give as many inks as possible. More inks means more frames in each cycle, and hence smoother animation – try adapting one of the mini-listings to run in mode 1, and see how much less convincing it is. Two of them also use CALL &BD19 – the same as the 664 FRAME keyword – to stop any flicker, but *Conveyor Belt* does perfectly well without this.

If all this sounds a bit complicated, don't worry. Compare the threelistings and then watch the programs running – you'll soon get the idea. In any case, you needn't understand a thing to enjoy the impressive graphics they produce.

Conveyor Belt

This amazing ultra-mini-listing from Roger Wilson of Blackburn isjust seven lines long, but it'll knock you dead. Machine code – who needs it?

```
10 DEG:MODE 0:INK 0,0:PAPER 0:BORDER 0
20 DIM col(14):FOR a=0 TO 14:READ col(a):INK a+1,col(a):NEXT
30 DATA 3,9,11,15,21,24,23,22,19,12,10,4,1,7,8
40 FOR b=0 TO 360 STEP 0.3:c=b MOD(13)
50 PLOT 321+300*COS(b),200+190*SIN(b),c+1
60 DRAW 321+300*SIN(b+190),200+190*COS(b+150),c+1:NEXT
70 FOR d=1 TO 13:FOR e=1 TO 13:INK e,col((d+e)MOD 13):NEXT:N
EXT:GOTO 70
```

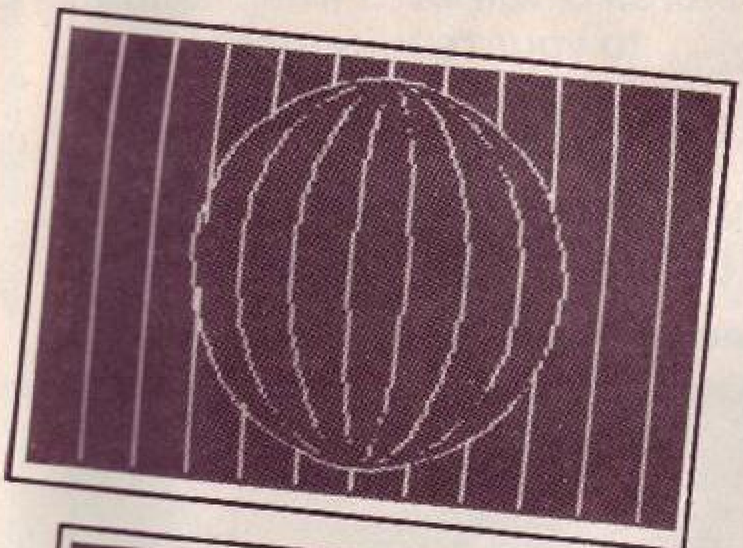
Swirl

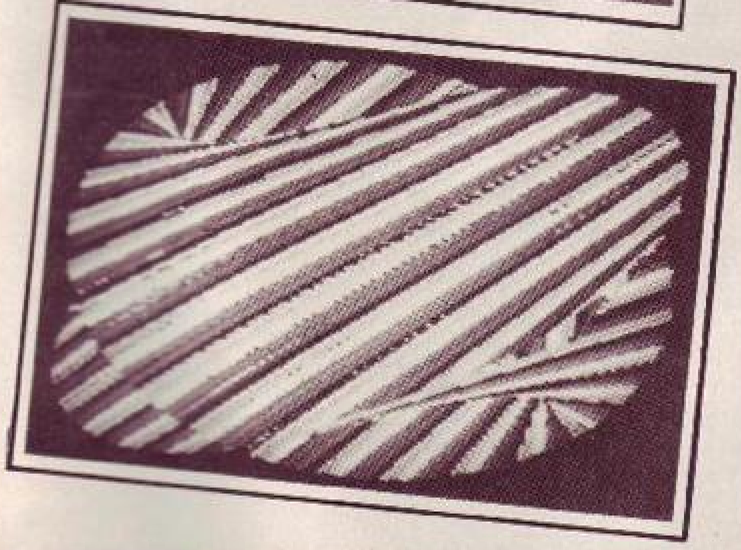
The name says it all, really. Paul Fairhurst's seventeen-liner draws two different shapes and they both swirl – and pretty fast, too.

```
10 INK 0,0:INK 1,4:INK 2,8:INK 3,12:INK 4,16:INK 5,20:INK
6,24
20 MODE 0:col=1:ORIGIN 320,200:DEG
30 FOR ang=1 TO 360
40 x=COS(ang):y=SIN(ang)
50 MOVE 320*x,100*y:DRAW 0,0,col:MOVE 100*y,320*x:DRAW 0,0
,col
60 IF col=6 THEN col=1 ELSE col=col+1
70 NEXT ang:FOR q=1 TO 40:GOSUB 110:NEXT q:col=1
80 CLS:ORIGIN 0,200:FOR n=0 TO 720:y=SIN(n):MOVE n*640/720
,198*y
90 DRAW 320,0,col:IF col=6 THEN col=1 ELSE col=col+1
100 NEXT n:FOR q=1 TO 40:GOSUB 110:NEXT q:MODE 2:LIST
110 CALL &BD19:INK 1,4:INK 2,8:INK 3,12:INK 4,16:INK 5,20:
INK 6,24:GOSUB 170
120 CALL &BD19:INK 1,24:INK 2,4:INK 3,8:INK 4,12:INK 5,16:
INK 6,20:GOSUB 170
130 CALL &BD19:INK 1,20:INK 2,24:INK 3,4:INK 4,8:INK 5,12:
INK 6,16:GOSUB 170
140 CALL &BD19:INK 1,16:INK 2,20:INK 3,24:INK 4,4:INK 5,8:
INK 6,12:GOSUB 170
150 CALL &BD19:INK 1,12:INK 2,16:INK 3,20:INK 4,24:INK 5,4
:INK 6,8:GOSUB 170
160 CALL &BD19:INK 1,8:INK 2,12:INK 3,16:INK 4,20:INK 5,24
:INK 6,4:GOSUB 170:RETURN
170 FOR z=1 TO 30:NEXT z:RETURN
```

Rotating Sphere

This may be the longest of the three, but it's well worth the typing time. You can make the sphere rotate or glitter, adjust its height and width, and give it a circular or straight line background. All of this courtesy of James Cadwallader – great stuff!





```
320 WHILE INKEY(16)()0
330 MODE 2:INPUT "Glittering or rotating?(g/r)",what$:IF L
OWER$(what$)="g" THEN code=1 ELSE code=0
335 INPUT "Width?(0-320)",xsize:INPUT "Height?(0-180)",ysi
ze:num=xsize:secondnum=ysize
340 INPUT "Circular background?(y/n)",back$:IF back$="y" T
HEN back=13 ELSE back=1
345 MODE 0
350 GOSUB 2340:'make inks visible
360 DEG
370 first=2:last=15
380 IF back=1 THEN GOSUB 1220
460 ORIGIN 320,200
470 IF back=13 THEN GOSUB 2390:'draw circular background
480 GOSUB 2000:'draw surround to sphere
490 GOSUB 2080
500 GOSUB 1790:'blank out inks
510 IF first=2 THEN GOSUB 1840 ELSE IF first=15 THEN GOSUB
 1930:'animate
520 WEND
530 END
1220 col=2
1230 FOR strip=0 TO 640 STEP 4
1240 MOVE strip,0
1250 DRAWR 0,400,col
1260 col=col+1:IF col=16 THEN col=2
1270 NEXT strip
1280 RETURN
1790 REM *** blank inks ***
1800 FOR blank=2 TO 15
1810 INK blank,0
1820 NEXT blank
1830 RETURN
1840 REM *** ink swap ***
1850 WHILE INKEY$=""
1860 FOR effect=2 TO 15
1870 INK effect,26
1880 CALL &BD19:REM put 'FRAME' here if you have a 664 or
6128
1890 INK effect,0
1900 NEXT effect
1910 WEND
1920 RETURN
1930 WHILE INKEY$=""
1940 FOR effect=15 TO 2 STEP -1
1950 INK effect,26
1960 CALL &BD19:REM put 'FRAME' here if you have a 664 or
6128
1970 INK effect,0
1980 NEXT effect
1990 WEND
1995 RETURN
2000 REM *** draw bordering circle to give solidity ***
2010 INK 1,26:PRINT CHR$(23);CHR$(0);
2020 FOR surround=0 TO 360 STEP 8
2030 x=SIN(surround)*(xsize+4)
2040 y=COS(surround)*(ysize+2)
2050 IF surround=0 THEN MOVE x,y ELSE DRAW x,y,1
2060 NEXT surround
2070 RETURN
2080 REM *** draw inside lines ***
2090 col=2
2100 PRINT CHR$(23);CHR$(code);
2110 WHILE xsize)-num
2120 FOR inside=0 TO 180 STEP 12
2130 x=SIN(inside)*xsize
2140 y=COS(inside)*ysize
2150 IF inside=0 THEN MOVE x,y ELSE DRAW x,y,col
2160 NEXT inside
2170 col=col+1:IF col=16 THEN col=2
2180 xsize=xsize-4
2190 WEND
2200 RETURN
2340 REM *** make inks visible ***
2350 FOR visible=0 TO 15
2360 INK visible,visible
2370 NEXT visible
2380 RETURN
2390 REM *** circular background ***
2400 col=2:PRINT CHR$(23);CHR$(0);
2410 xcirc=xsize+8
2420 ycirc=ysize+4
2430 WHILE xcirc(460
2440 FOR angle=0 TO 360 STEP 12
2450 x=SIN(angle)*xcirc
2460 y=COS(angle)*ycirc
2470 IF angle=0 THEN MOVE x,y ELSE DRAW x,y,col
2480 NEXT angle
2490 col=col+1:IF col=16 THEN col=2
2500 xcirc=xcirc+4
2510 ycirc=ycirc+2
2520 WEND
2530 RETURN
```

WARD

an program why not put
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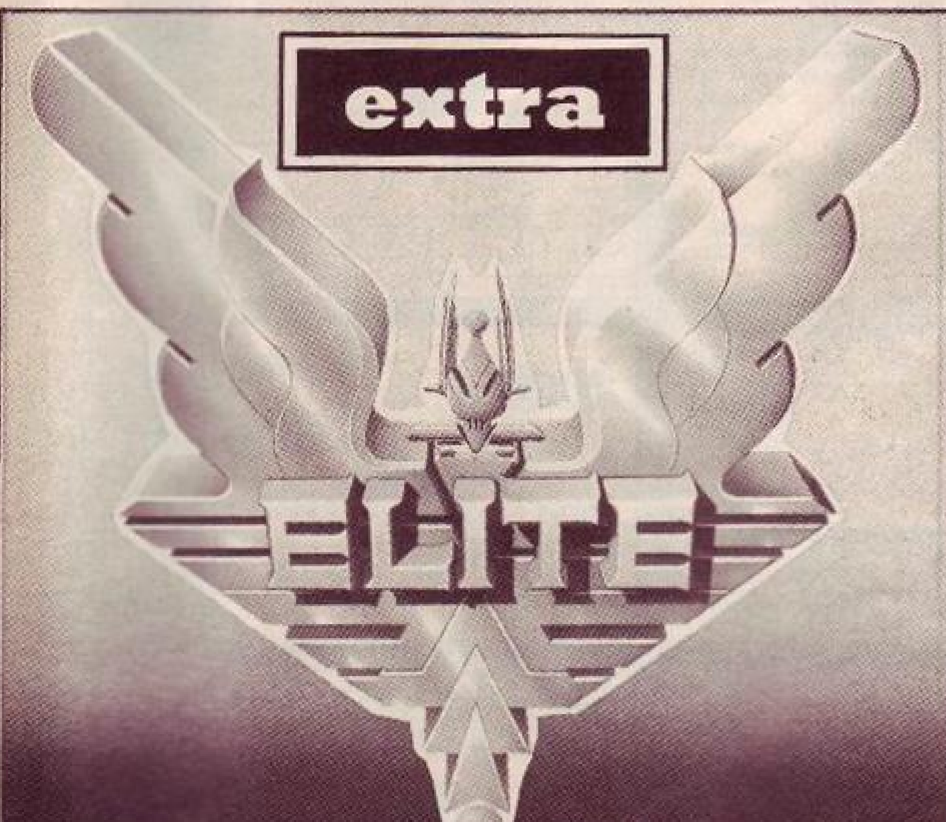
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CHEAT MODE

The section where your tips, pokes and devious game-busting ploys are relayed to the nation



After last month's mega tips on how to play the game we've got some more underhand and informative cheats from Tim Walsha from Henley, David Cooper from Macclesfield and Rhys Jones from Peterborough. Two special missions have also been discovered but we're not going to give the game away on them – let's just say that both involve space stations in danger.

The first tip is a way to dock easily without a docking computer. Choose a system to hyperspace to and go there. Then get yourself killed by any means possible. Press "Y" in response to the "Load new Commander?" prompt but then save the commander to tape. Now return to the game and you are docked at the space station of the system you hyperspaced to.

Taking on Thargoids in witch space is a deadly pastime but you can automatically make it happen. First choose a hyperspace system and then pause the game. Press the "F" key, restart the game and then hyperspace. You appear in witch space with three or four Thargoid motherships and an average survival time of under a minute. To leave you just pause the game, press F, restart and hyperspace again to the system you originally intended.

BLAGGER



William Ryan from Waterford has sent in a poke for the Alligata game that gives infinite lives and disables conveyor belts. It's entered using method one, although there won't be any prompts on the screen. The poke works with both the Alligata and Amsoft versions.

```
10 MEMORY &1700
20 BORDER 0
30 LOAD"!BLAGGER£2"
40 MODE 0
50 DATA 0, 29, 2, 6, 18, 8, 9, 26,
10, 20, 20, 15, 0, 0, 26, 0
60 FOR C=0 TO 15:READ I:INK
C,I,I:NEXT
70 ENT -3,10,1,5,1,-10,1
80 ENT 3,14,-1,20
90 ENT -1,100,1,2
100 ENT 1,15,-1,20
110 ENT -2,10,1,1,1,-15,1
120 ENT 2,100,0,1,14,-1,15
130 ENT 5,13,-1,5
140 ENT 6,15,-1,7
150 ENT -6,1,1,2,1,-1,2
160 POKE &9C02,0:POKE
&9C03,0:POKE &9C04,0:POKE
&9C09,0
170 POKE &7A4E,195
180 POKE 31938,0:POKE 31940,0
190 POKE 32579,0:POKE 32580,0
200 CALL &7F56
```

Starion

Nice tip for the Melbourne House space game from Philip Wand of Brentwood. Just keep the fire button held down and as soon as a ship enters your sights it will explode. Philip suggests just taping the fire button down. This prevents the need for repeated presses of the fire button that may cost you lives as the ship overheats.

Three Weeks in Paradise

Sean Brady from Eltham and Glenn Sims of Barton-under-Needwood have both completed Mikro-Gen's latest arcade adventure so here are some tips culled from their solutions.

1. Two sticks and some boy scout training will warm the forge.
2. Don't get sand between your toes – put something on your feet.
3. This geyser 'ere says he'll fill you in billy.
4. The cancer constellation is a hydrophobe.
5. A loud shout or a bell that hurts will waft a fire.
6. A cricket prize will make a pagan god dance.
7. Move the weather pattern to a flammable roof.
8. A substitute for tweezers will solve Daniel's problem.
9. A drip of water can be collected in hard outer covering at the place that isn't ill.
10. No frying tonight if you douse those flames.

That little lot should enable you to rescue Herbert – but you'll have to work out how to save Wilma yourself.

Who Dares Wins II

The map was compiled from the excellent contributions of Andrew Ketteringham from Nottingham and someone who forgot to enclose their name but sent tips on *Kong Strikes Back* and *Spellbound* as well. The tips have been compiled with their help and that of Martyn Robinson from Brierfield and Jason Stanway from Biddulph.

Stationary gunners – these can be killed by blowing them up with grenades or by walking level with them so that they are forced into the open.

Snipers – pop up and down intermittently allowing themselves to be shot when exposed. They can also be blown up in their foxholes using grenades.

Mortars – can be blown up with grenades or forced to leave their positions by getting horizontally level with them.

Outposts – try to appear in line with the door where most men appear and blast them as they come out. Also try to get the one fast-moving man for a 1250 bonus before he disappears off the bottom of the screen.

Tanks – can be blown up with grenades or coaxed off screen by moving to the edges or by getting level with them.

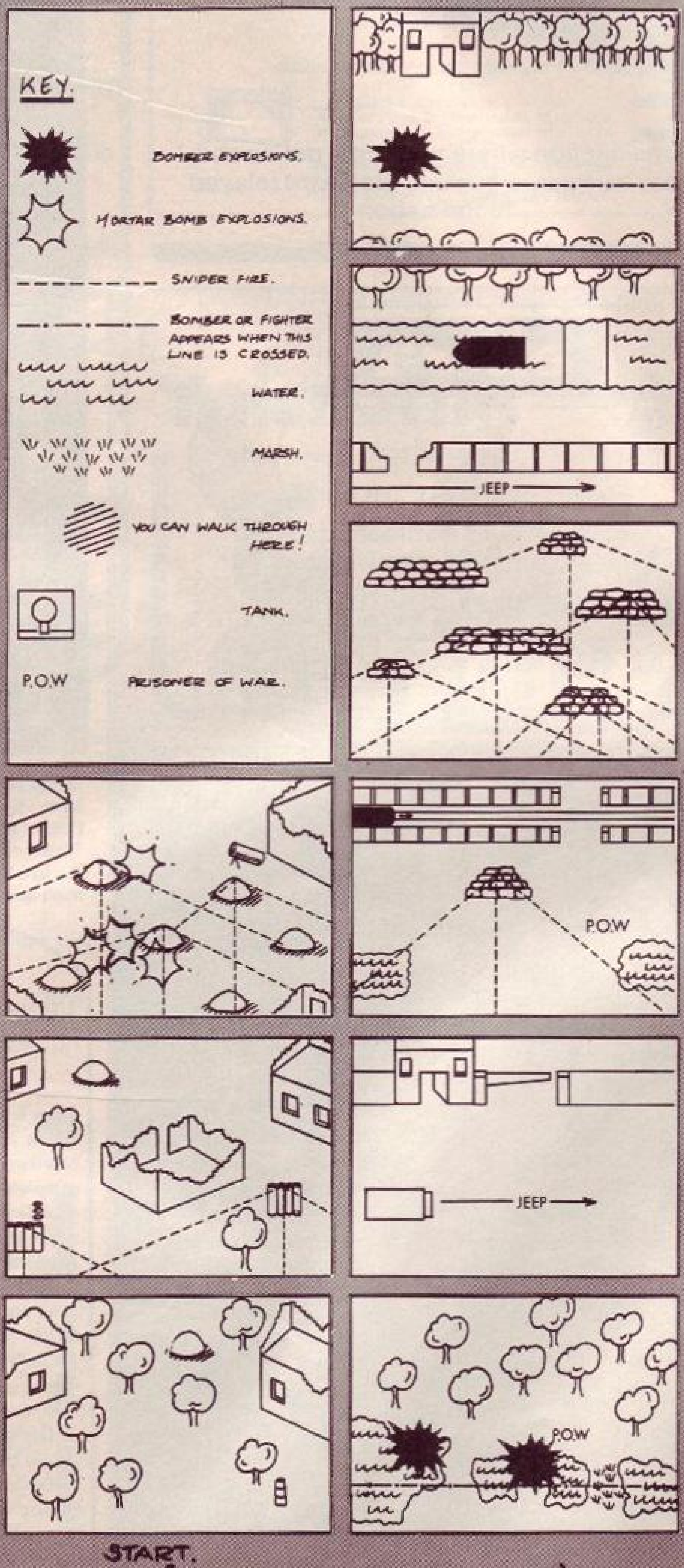
Bombers – there is a slight random factor in where their bombs drop so just steer well clear of those locations when crossing the danger lines for them.

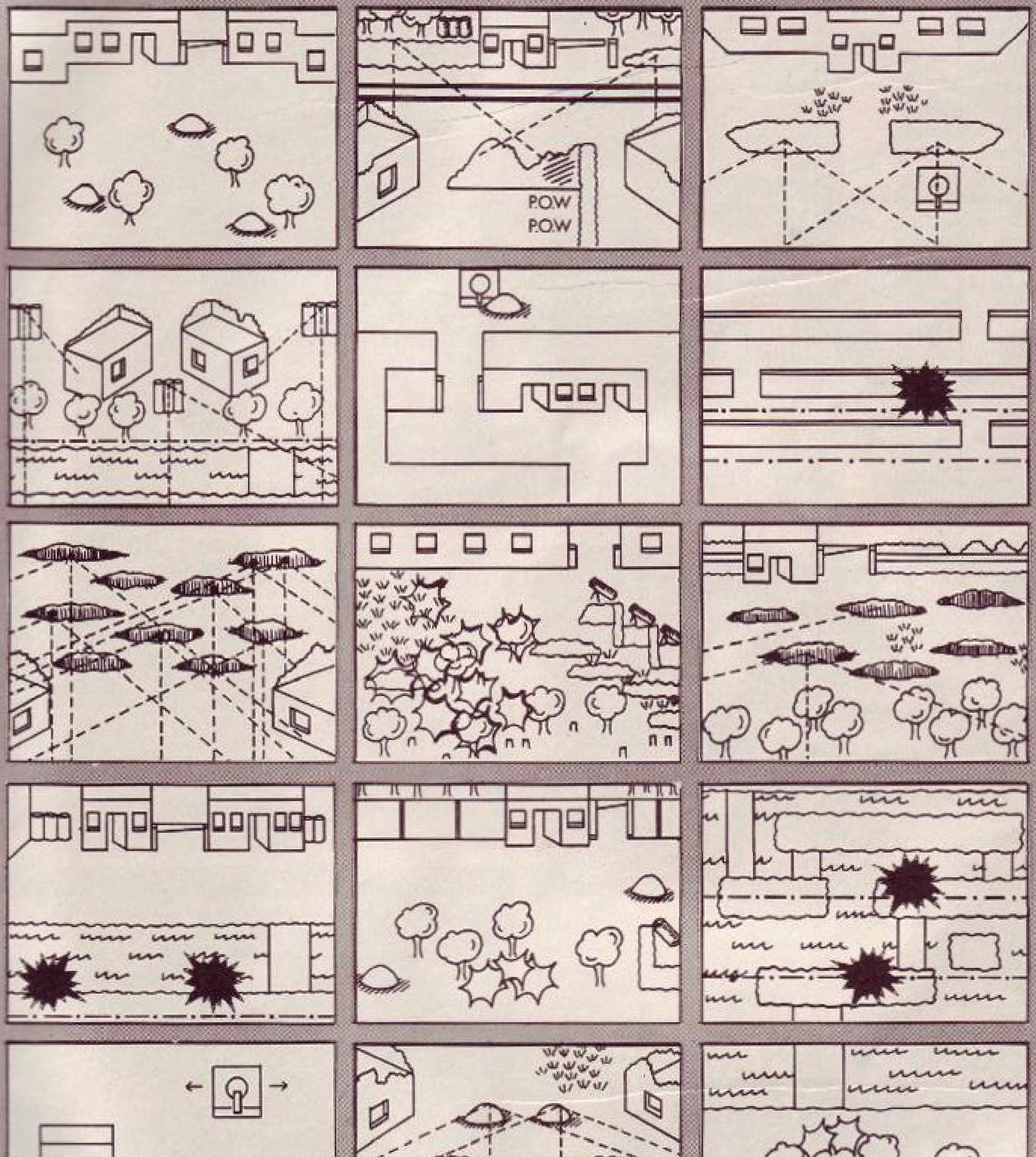
Fighters – these are really nasty, particularly when you're not expecting them. To avoid them you'll need to be running diagonally up the screen when crossing the line so that you just miss its strafing fire.

Supplies – collect these as quickly as possible, otherwise the soldiers may blow them up.

POWs – line yourself up right for shooting the executioner as soon as you appear on a screen with a POW. This gives you a nice bonus each time.

Grenades – when throwing these don't get too close to the top of the screen or they will disappear. Also beware of rapid throwing caused by holding the fire button down for too long.




P.O.W
P.O.W
P.O.W

CHEAT MODE

Sabre Wulf
TLL
Highway Encounter

Phil Howard from Nottingham – who gave us the *TSAM JSW* poke last month – has come up with THREE more real crackers. All are entered using method one. The *Highway Encounter* one will freeze the aliens on the first run through (except for spiky balls), leaving the time limit to beat. On subsequent runs the aliens will start to move again but by then you will have seen the marvellous ending at zone zero.

The *Sabre Wulf* poke simply gives you 255 lives to complete the game. The *TLL* poke gives infinite lives, fuel, bombs and time – easy huh? Congratulations Phil on some really fabulous pokes.

Sabre Wulf

```
10 DATA 21, 2C, 97, 36, 19, 23,
36, 0F, 23, 36, 11
20 DATA 21, C3, 9B, 36, 04, C3,
1A, 88, 21, 74, 22
30 DATA 36, 05, 23, 36, BB, 21,
40, 20, 11, 40, 00
40 DATA 01, 36, 02, ED, B0, 21,
40, 00, E5, 21, 00
50 DATA BB, E5, 21, 36, 02, E5,
21, 07, B8, E5, 21
60 DATA BB, 02, E5, F1, 21, EA,
B1, 11, D9, B1, F3
70 DATA C9
80 MEMORY &2000
90 LOAD""
100 LOAD"!", &2040
110 FOR X=&BE00 TO &BE42
120 READ A$
130 POKE X,VAL("&"+A$)
140 NEXT
150 MODE 1
160 POKE &BE0F,255
170 CALL &BE13
```

TLL

```
10 DATA 21,8A,90,36,00
20 DATA 21,A2,A6,36,00
30 DATA 21,C8,A8,36,00
40 DATA 21,9B,A9,36,00
50 DATA 21,7A,91,36,00
60 DATA C3, F5, BF, 21, 77, 22,
36, 25, 23, 36, E2
70 DATA 21, 40, 20, 11, 40, 00, 01,
3A, 02, ED, B0
80 DATA 21, 40, 00, E5, 21, 00,
BD, E5, 21, 3A, 02
90 DATA E5, 21, 07, B8, E5, 21,
BB, 02, E5, F1, 21
100 DATA EA, B1, 11, D9, B1, F3,
C9
110 MEMORY &2000
120 LOAD""
130 MODE 1
140 CALL &3C6A
150 LOAD"!",&2040
160 FOR X=&BF40 TO &BF8B
170 READ A$
180 POKE X,VAL("&"+A$)
190 NEXT
200 CALL &BF5C
```

Highway Encounter

```
10 DATA 21, 40, 00, 11, 00, 9C,
01, 40, 00, ED, B0
20 DATA 21, 80, 00, 11, 40, 00, 01
00, 99, ED, B0
30 DATA 21, 77, 00, 36, 03, 21, 00
9C, 11, 00, 00
40 DATA 01, 40, 00, ED, B0, C3,
F2, 01, 21, 74, 22
50 DATA 36, 0F, 23, 36, A0, 21,
5D, 22, 36, 5B, 21
60 DATA 40, 20, 11, 40, 00, 01, 37
02, ED, B0, 21
70 DATA 40, 00, E5, 21, 00, BB,
E5, 21, 37, 02, E5
80 DATA 21, 07, B8, E5, 21, BB,
02, E5, F1, 21, EA
90 DATA B1, 11, D9, B1, F3, C9
100 MEMORY &2000
110 LOAD""
120 MODE 1
130 CALL &3A6A
140 LOAD"!",&3A6A
150 FOR X=&9B00 TO &9B5D
160 READ A$
170 POKE X,VAL("&"+A$)
180 NEXT
190 CALL &9B29
```

Poke methods

This is the section where we explain how to input the majority of the pokes using two types of method.

Method 1: Type in the listing. Rewind the game tape. Type RUN followed by pressing enter. Follow on screen prompts to load the game.

Method 2: The tape header/loader/title screen, comprising usually of one or two data blocks has to be skipped. Rewind the game tape. Type in CAT followed by enter and play the tape. Watch the screen and a message will come up

Found FILENAME block 1 OK

where FILENAME will be replaced by the name of the loading section. The next message that appears will be the main program appearing in the same style.

Found MAINFILE block 1 OK

where the MAINFILE will be different for each game. Note the point on the tape counter at which this second file appears. Stop the tape and rewind to just before that point. Type in the program and RUN it. Then press play on the tape deck.

Strangeloop

A couple of tips here from various sources. The first is that you can be directly beneath a crusher in the jet cycle without getting killed. More interesting, though, is a cheat that allows you to get past difficult obstacles. All you do is pause the game and then select load. Press any key and then escape from there and position your man anywhere on screen with- out losing a life.

Tim Gurney from Prestatyn has come up with the key to success on this combat game. He's told us what effect the first eight vases have and how you might destroy the dragon.

Vase 1: Makes a dragon appear.
Vase 2: Gives six energy markers.
Vase 3: Kills next opponent.
Vase 4: Drains six energy markers.
Vase 5: Opponent's blows inflict damage on himself.
Vase 6: Gives 500 bonus points.
Vase 7: Kills next opponent.
Vase 8: Drains six energy markers.

When you reach the temple drain the energy of the warrior outside as much as possible as this will weaken the dragon inside as well. When he is dead run to the mummy before a second dragon appears.



GRUMPY GUMPHREY SUPERSLEUTH

To make this manically frustrating game from Gremlin a little less frustrating here are some clues compiled from D Sharkey's tips.

1. Not à l'orange, more à l'Eastwood.
2. Something bugging you? Spray it again man.
3. Granny gives advice on debugging and shoplifters.
4. The woman's lost her baby but he's a sucker with a sweet tooth if you can get him on the move. No lost property so take him to the boss.
5. Manacle an offender's hands and take him to the boss.

We're also printing D Sharkey's map of the rooms and objects to help you find your way around.

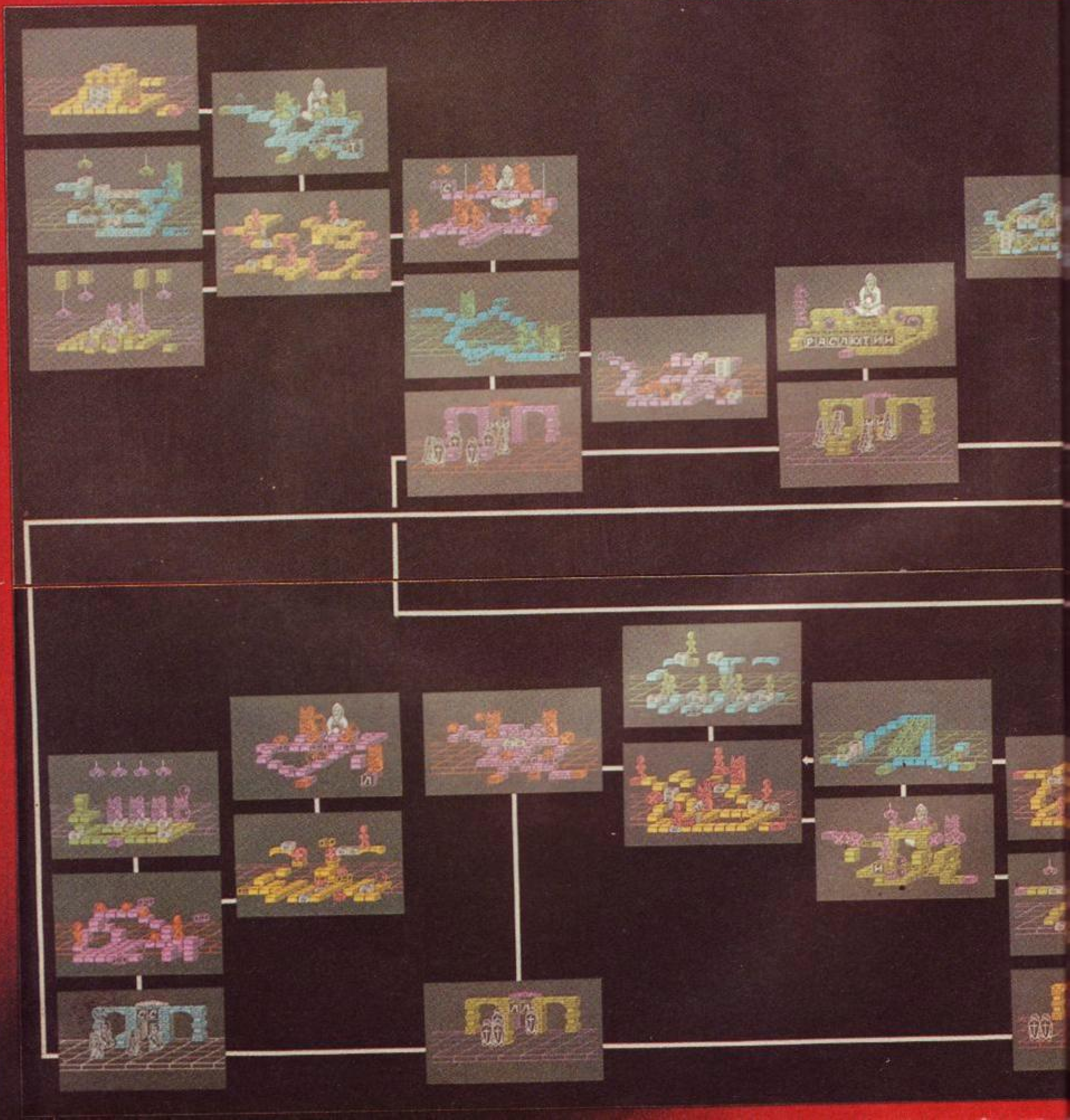




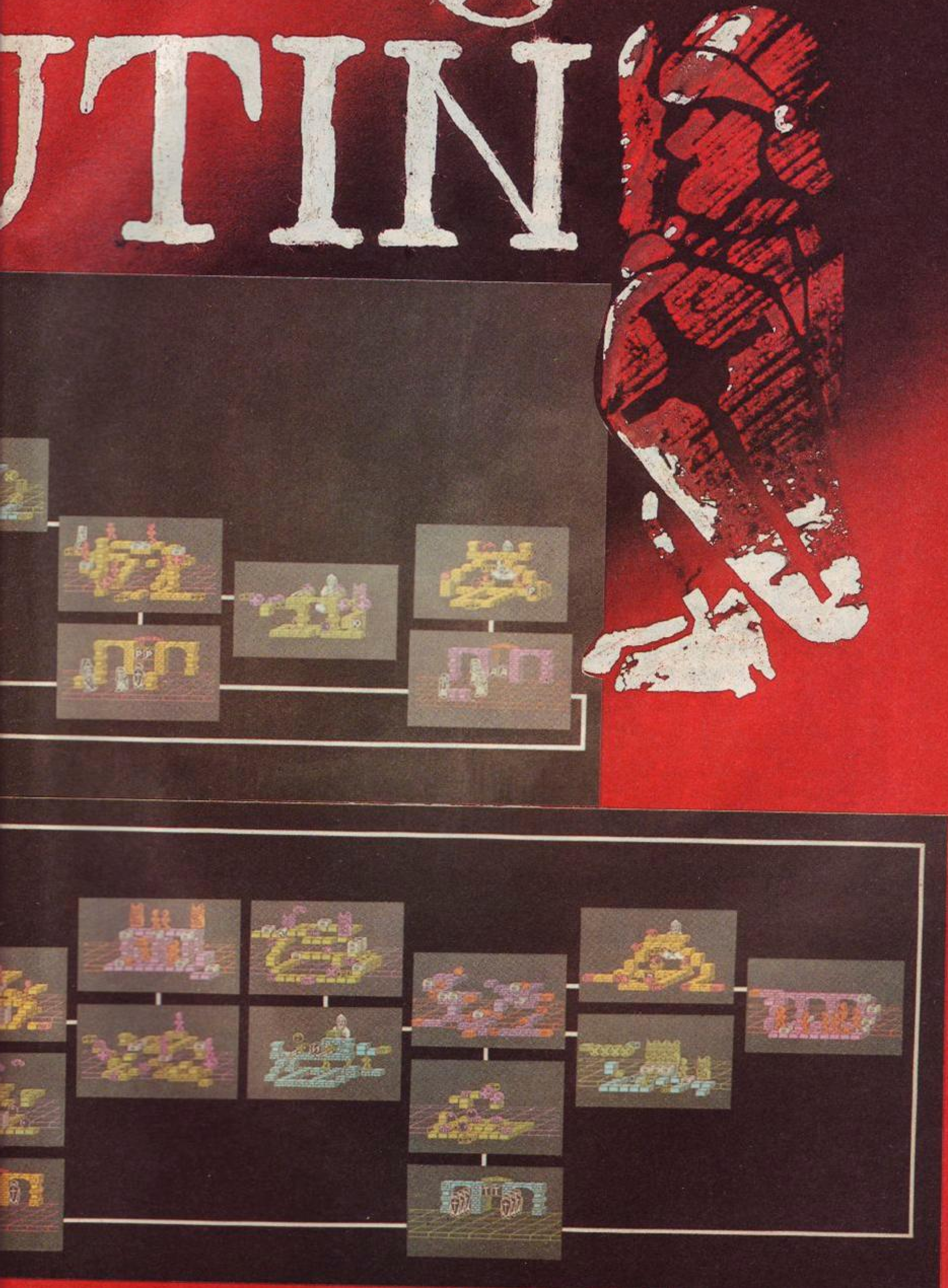
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the map

ЯASPU

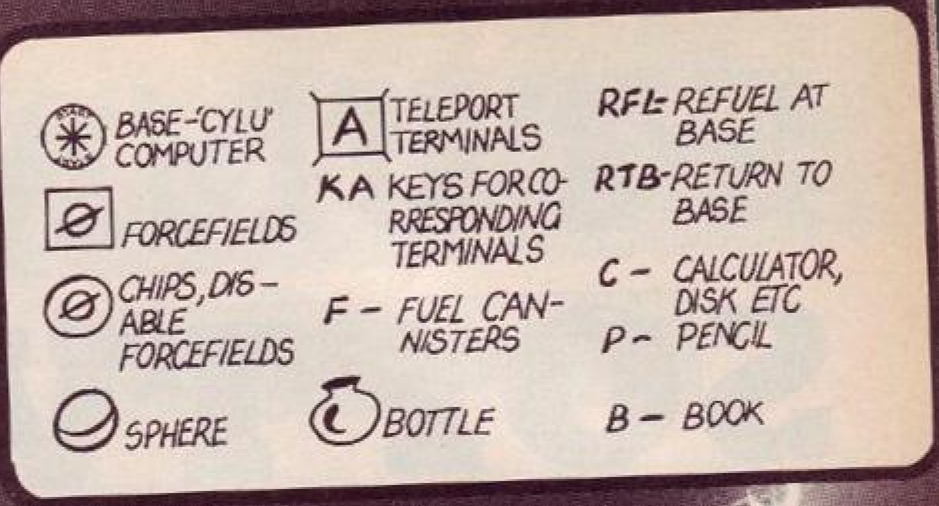


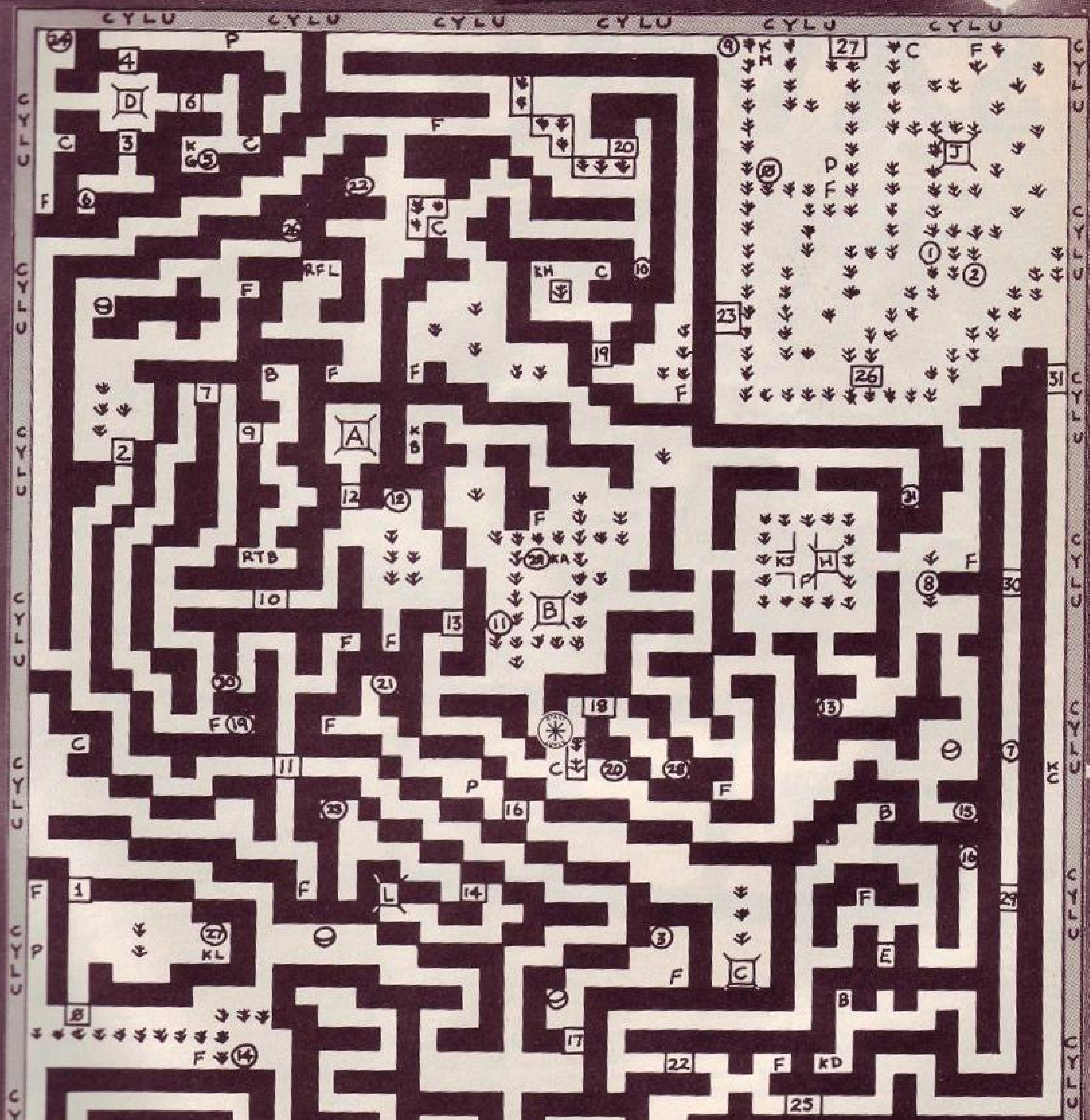
UTIŇ



Cylu

Paul Robson from Cleveland has followed up his *Chimera* map with one of another Firebird game that may be causing problems. The thing to notice about it is that there is a perspective change to the way it looks on screen to make mapping easier. Well done Paul – what's next?





STUNNING SOFTWARE $AVINGS!

Wake up to Amstrad Action's unique mail order service

Watch out for your fingers, these pages are HOT! They give you a way of getting hold of sizzling software at sizzling discounts. Simply by using the vouchers printed below, you can obtain discounts ranging from 50p to a full £5 on the programs you want. It makes it easy to recoup the complete cost of this magazine at a stroke!

In addition to these discounts, almost all orders qualify for a special, no-strings-attached FREE GIFT ranging from blank cassettes to full-priced games.

We know of no more exciting way of getting the programs you need.

▶ **Reliable**

▶ **Economic**

▶ **Fast**

FREE!

with any order over £5

A C15 data cassette. These cassettes contain high-quality tape especially designed for use by computer owners. They come in library case with blank inlay card.

with any order over £15

Your pick of any one of the games featured in the SOFTWARE SUPER-SALE box! They're worth from £8-10 each! (Please note, you should specify a second choice on the order form in case your first choice is out of stock.)

with any order over £30

Your pick of any TWO of the games featured in the SOFTWARE SUPER-SALE box! It means you can pick up games *whose shop price is worth more* than half your total order! (Please note, you should specify second choices on the order form in case your first choices are out of stock.)

50p VOUCHER
For use with orders from £5.00-£9.99
(max. one voucher per order)

£1 VOUCHER
For use with orders from £10.00-£19.99
(max. one voucher per order)

£2 VOUCHER
For use with orders from £20.00-£49.99
(max. one voucher per order)

£5 VOUCHER
For use with orders over £50.00
(max. one voucher per order)

The rave way of buying raves

If you're not sure quite what games you'd like you could do worse than make a selection from this list – it's made up of programs given an AA Rave review in this or previous issues of Amstrad Action. Remember that by sending in vouchers you can obtain considerable savings on the listed prices.

HOT STUFF

YIE AR KUNG FU
Hilarious combat action. £8.95 cass

BOUNTY BOB STRIKES BACK
Oh-so-addictive platforming. £9.95 cass, £13.95 disk.

SPY VS SPY
Wacky cartoon capers. £9.95 cass.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN
Classy wargame. £9.95 cass.

3D GRAND PRIX
Tire-burning graphics! £9.95 cass £13.95 disk.

BRUCE LEE
Leaping and fighting. £9.95 cass, £13.95 disk

RAID
Bombing the Commies. £9.95 cass, £13.95 disk

MATCHDAY
Skilful soccer play. £8.95 cass

NIGHTSHADE
Dazzling graphics from Ultimate. £9.95 cass

SWEEVO'S WORLD
Humourous, stylish, brain-teasing. £7.95 cass

TLL
Unbelievable scrolling. £8.95 cass

BARRY McGUIGAN'S BOXING
Best Amstrad boxing game. £9.95 cass

BOULDER DASH
You can't stop playing. £9.95 cass

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT
Great adventure epic. £8.95 cass £12.95 disk

CYRUS 2 CHESS
Looks superb, plays tough. £9.95 cass £13.95 disk

WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
Smash-hit combat. £9.95 cass

WHO DARES WINS II
Great Commando-style shoot-em-up. £8.95 cass

SPELLBOUND
Bargain arcade-adventure. £2.99 cass

TANK COMMAND
Tough battle-field action. £13.95 disk

SKYFOX
3D air combat simulator. £9.95 cass

DALEY THOMPSON's SUPERTEST
Eight more gruelling events. £8.95 cass

IMPORTANT

► If you want the disk version of a game you must mark this clearly on the order form. Otherwise you'll get a cassette. Do check first that a disk version exists and that you have the right price for it.

► We try to be as accurate as we can in giving details on price and disk-version availability. However we can't be held liable for any errors which may have crept in.



HOW ORDERS ARE DEALT WITH

Amstrad Action Mail Order is run here in Somerton, but in a separate location from the main AA HQ. The operation is run by the super-efficient SUE TAYLOR, the woman who gets more mail in a day than most people get each year!

Unless your order includes programs which our suppliers cannot get hold of for some reason, Sue will despatch all packages within three days of receiving them. Therefore, allowing for the time in the post, you can normally expect to receive your parcel within a week to 10 days of ordering.

If it's delayed beyond that, the chances are you've ordered a title which either hasn't yet been released or is temporarily unavailable. In which case a phone call from you WON'T speed things up. (In fact, the reverse. Phone-calls are very time-consuming to deal with.) Naturally, if a long delay was likely we'd let you know.

Selecting serious software

If games aren't your scene, how about choosing one of these excellent programs (or any other serious software...)?

TASWORD 6128
Superb word-processor for 6128 owners making full use of the extra memory. £24.95 disk.

TASWORD 464/464D
The earlier versions for 464 or 664 owners. The disk program includes a mail-merge facility. £19.95 cass, £24.95 disk.

IDISCOVERY
Probably the best of the tape-to-disk copiers. £7.99 cass, £11.99 disk.

SUPERCALC 2
The amazing CP/M spreadsheet which sells for hundreds of pounds on other micros. £49.95 disk.

MASTERFILE
A good value database. £24.95 cass, £29.95 disk

MASTERCALC
Campbell Systems' powerful spreadsheet. Only £24.95 cass, £29.95 disk

SOFTWARE SUPER-SALE

These games only £2.95 each!

ley, how about this? Sixteen Amstrad game-titles which you can uy at about ONE THIRD of the shop price! They may not be AA aves, but all but a couple are perfectly good pieces of software. Most received AA ratings of 60-70%, but that was based on their ull asking price of £8-10. At just £2.95 each they're great bargains.

You can order them in the normal way by filling in the Mail Order Section of our All-in-One Action Form. And remember, if our order is large enough you can claim further discounts and naybe even extra games FREE!

AMERICAN FOOTBALL (Argus/Amsoft)
Good simulation needing accurate tactical thinking. AA Rating 70%

AMSGOLF (Computersmith/Amsoft)
How low can you get your handicap? AA Rating 67%

CHUCKIE EGG (A'n'F)
Hugely addictive, high-scoring platform game. AA Rating 78%

CLASSIC ADVENTURE (Amsoft)
The great adventure that started it all. Pre-Pilgrim.

CODENAME MAT (Amsoft/Micromega)
Demanding 3D space shoot-em-up. AA Rating 71%

ELECTRO FREDDY (Amsoft/Softspot)
Frantic, humourous, one-screen action. AA Rating 57%

HUNTER KILLER (Amsoft/Protek)
Submarine warfare simulation. AA Rating 47%

JET BOOT JACK (Amsoft/English Software)
Challenging platform game with slick graphics. AA Rating 70%

LASER WARP (Amsoft/MikroGen)
Smooth, colourful, classic shoot-em-up. AA Rating 84%.

MANIC MINER (Amsoft/Software Projects)
The classic wacky platform game. AA Rating 64%

MASTER CHESS (Amsoft/MikroGen)
Worthy multi-level chess game. AA Rating 60%

MESSAGE FROM ANDROMEDA
Offering for Adventure fans. Pre-pilgrim.

ROLAND GOES DIGGING (Amsoft/Gem)
Frenetic version of 'Space Panic'. AA Rating 84%

SPACE HAWKS (Amsoft/Durell)
Version of the shoot-em-up classic 'Galaxians'. AA Rating 49%

SPLAT! (Amsoft/Incentive)
Fast-moving, original arcade game. AA Rating 63%

SUPER-PIPELINE II (Amsoft/Taskset)
Nice graphics, nice music, easy action. AA Rating 71%

Overseas readers can join in!

Readers in the Republic of IRELAND can order any of these goods at the same rates as British readers provided that payment is made in pounds Sterling. If you wish to pay in Irish punts you must add a IR£3.50 surcharge IN ADDITION to allowing for the current exchange rate – that's what it costs us to pay in your cheques or postal orders.

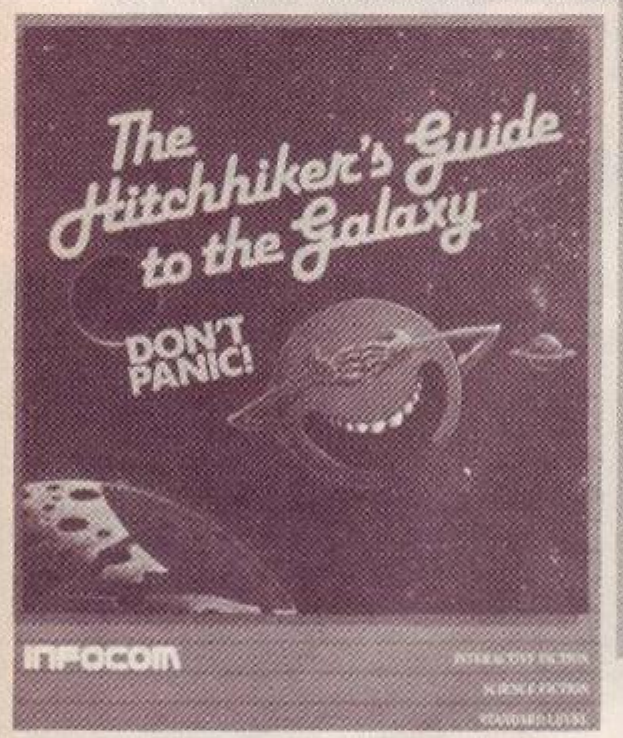
Readers elsewhere in EUROPE must add 25% to the cost of their order to allow for extra postage rates. Payment must be in pounds Sterling.

If you live OUTSIDE EUROPE please add 50% to the cost of your order to cover postage. Please also specify whether you require air-mail or surface delivery. We will pay refunds in cases where the postage turns out substantially cheaper than the extra money you have paid. Once again, payment must be in pounds Sterling.

INFOCOM ADVENTURES

Save £6+!!

Hitch-hikers' Guide only £19.95 (disk)!
Other adventures only £16.95 (disk)!
CPC 464/664/6128 / PCW 8256 compatible



No one who's played an Infocom adventure is likely to dispute that they are among the most sophisticated computer entertainments money can buy.

There are no graphics, no animation, no colours. But the text you are given on screen and the programs' astonishing ability to understand and respond to your typed instructions are enough to have you glued to the keyboard for weeks.

'Hitch-hikers' Guide to the Galaxy' based on the Douglas Adams book/radio show/TV series is the most recent Infocom title and has made adventurers around the world speechless with its mix of brilliant humour and brain-twisting puzzles.

But the other titles in the range – Zork 1, Deadline, Seastalker and Planetfall – are also superb.

We've pulled out all the stops on these games to offer you them at absolutely the biggest discount we can afford. The retail price of 'Hitch-hikers' has been widely quoted as £24.95, but this in fact is the price EXCLUDING VAT. With VAT it works out at £28.69, so our offer of £19.95 (which INCLUDES VAT, post and packing) is almost £9 off!

Similarly the recommended price of the rest of the range is £22.95 each (£19.95 + VAT) so you can save £6 by buying it from us.

S * SPECIAL OFFERS * SPECI

THE MUSIC SYSTE

Only £12.95 cass, £16.95 disk!
464/664/6128 compatible



This program from Rainbird Software is very special indeed – by far the most sophisticated music composing system available on the Amstrad. It allows you to create and play a wide range of synthesized sounds, turning your Amstrad into a powerful musical keyboard.

It's already a bargain at its shop price of £15.95 on cassette, £19.95 on disk. However, as you can see, you can buy it direct from us for even less. It's a great offer for anyone interested in music.

MOON CRESTA

Only £8.50 cass inc. T-shirt!
464/664/6128 compatible

Free T-shirt!



OK, arcade freaks, here's a tasty little offer. Buy from us the classic shoot-em-up new out from Incentive Software and we give you a beautiful and exclusive Moon Cresta T-shirt. The only extra you pay is 55p post and packing – not bad for a T-shirt worth £3.95, eh?

Don't forget to specify your size on the order form!



BIG LEAGUE SOCCER

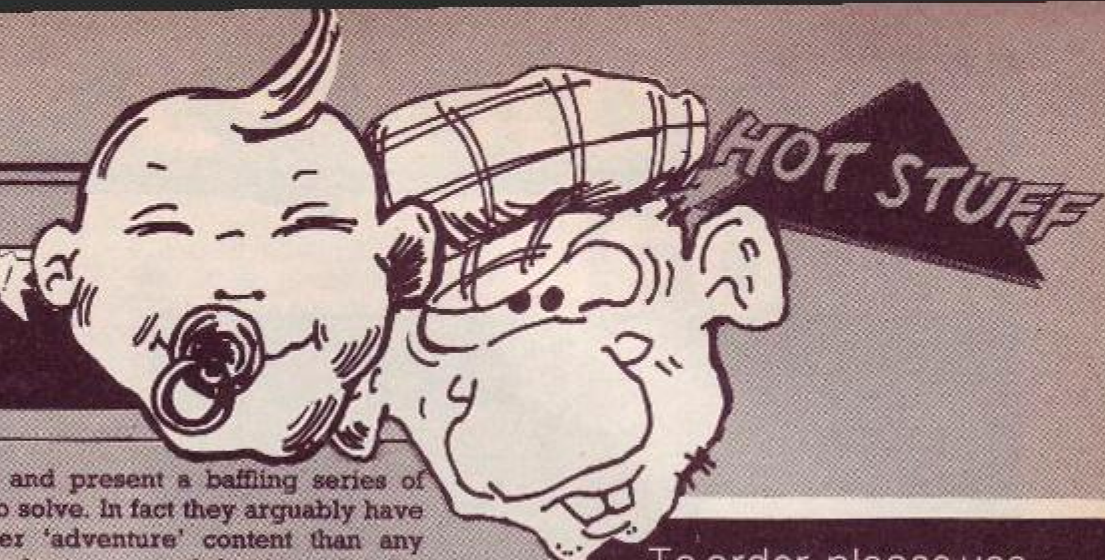
Save £2!

Only £4.95 cass
464/664/6128 compatible

This game won an AA Rave review which described it as 'better than Football Manager'. It puts you in the role of a league manager with all the financial and personnel decisions that involves. Experience the agony of sweating over your team selection and then watching your players outmanoevred on the pitch during the graphic highlights of each match! Or maybe you can cheer up our publisher by guiding Southampton to the top of the first Division...

I'm over the moon about this one, Brian.





WALLY GAMES

Only £6.90 for TWO!

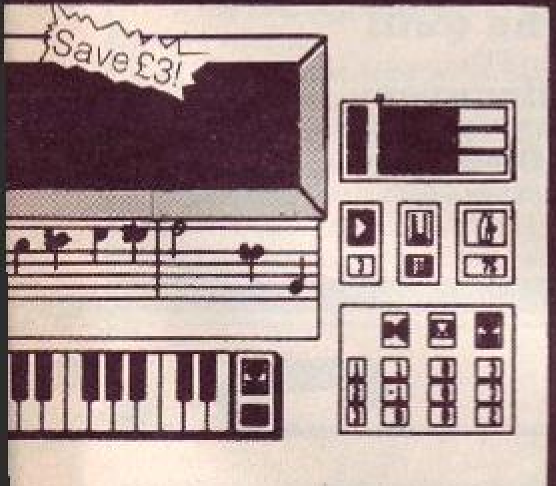
Super offer for fans of those lovable Wallies who star in that trio of excellent Mikrogen games Pyjamarama, Everyone's a Wally and Herbert's Dummy Run. You can have any TWO of these programs for, wait for it, £6.90 – they would normally cost almost £20!

The games feature great colourful graphics and present a baffling series of puzzles to solve. In fact they arguably have a stronger 'adventure' content than any other arcade game – and they're going for a song.

To order, please use the Special Offer section of the all-in-one form on p110

(Please note, these offers are separate from the rest of our mail order scheme. You cannot use vouchers to obtain further discounts, and you cannot claim the free gifts – we've already knocked off the most we can!)

AL OFFERS * SPECIA

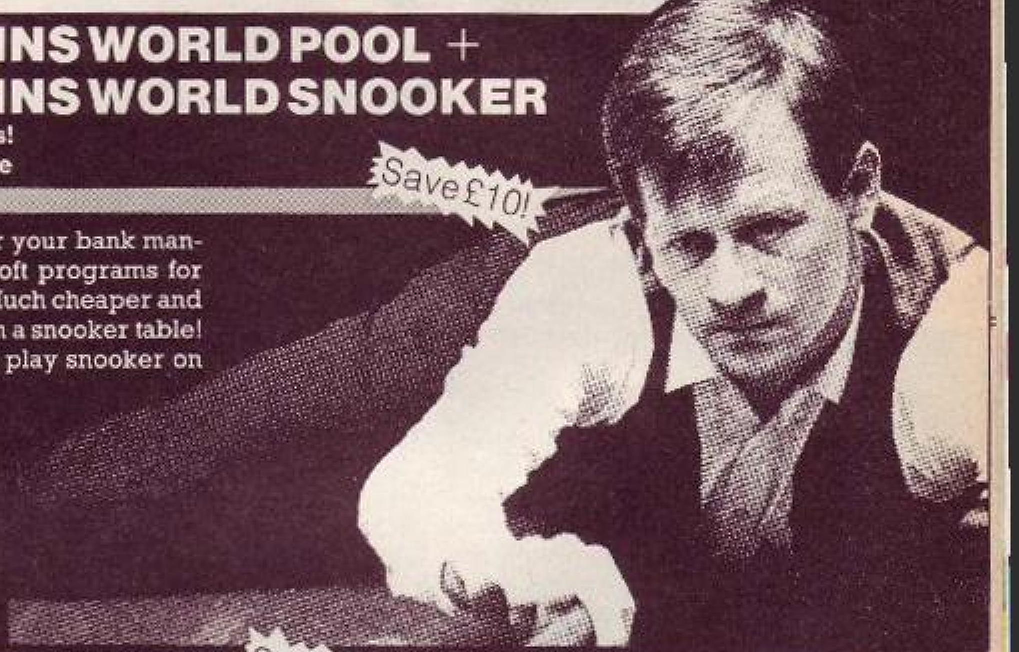


ALEX HIGGINS WORLD POOL + ALEX HIGGINS WORLD SNOOKER

Only £7.90 two cassettes!
464/664/6128 compatible

Save £10!

Here's your cue to snooker your bank manager and pocket two Amsoft programs for less than the price of one. Much cheaper and easier to accommodate than a snooker table! Allows you and a friend to play snooker on TV anytime you like.



ELITE

Save £3!

Only £11.95 cass, £16.95 disk!
464/664/6128 compatible

If you've been wowed by our review of Firebird's amazing space epic Elite, but can't quite manage the normal asking price, here's an offer to blast you into hyperspace – a full £3 off the normal price of both the cassette and disk versions (yes, the shop price for the disk version is £19.95, not £17.95 as we printed two months ago).

If you've missed out on all the excitement about the game, just take it from us that Elite is one of THE greatest computer games of all time. In fact, it can become a way of life.

(Please note that at time of writing the disk version is still unavailable because of a shortage of 3" disks, while the cassette version has been temporarily withdrawn because of a bug. Both these problems are expected to be resolved by the time this magazine is on sale.)

MINI OFFICE 2

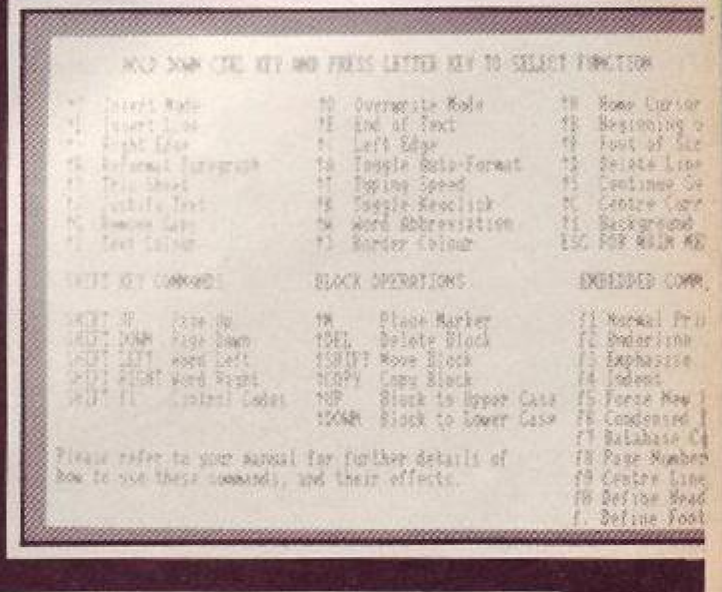
Save £3!

Only £11.95 cass, £16.95 disk!
464/664/6128 compatible

Strange as it may seem for us to pour praise on a title produced by one of our competitors, it is nonetheless true: Mini Office 2 (created by Database, publishers of 'Computing with the Amstrad') offers astonishing value for money – SIX interlinked programs which can transform your computer into a machine of immense power.

The programs are: Word Processor, Database, Spreadsheet, Graphics, Communications, and Label Printer. All are remarkably full-featured for a package of this cost – so this is not just a superb introduction to someone unfamiliar with serious software, it has the power to be put to genuine use.

Considering you could pay £20 for any one of the six programs, the 'Mini Office 2' shop price of £14.95 cass, £19.95 disk is something of a bargain. You can draw your own conclusions about the value of this offer...



Amstrad Action Readers' Charts

Elite maintains its Elite Status in the games charts this month, despite the nasty business about the bug. Otherwise there's little change among the games, except for the popularity of Vortex's *TLL*. But look out for next month's charts – what effect are *Spindizzy*, *Get Dexter*, and *Batman* going to have?

On the serious side the AMX Mouse has vaulted to the top, though last month's leader *GAC* is still up there in contention. *Protext* has made a pretty impressive debut, as has *Mini Office 2*. Do two *Mini Offices* make one *Big Office*? Watch this space for the answer.

SERIOUS SOFTWARE TOP 10

1. AMX Mouse
AMS – 13.2%

2. Graphic Adventure Creator
Incentive – 9.6%

3. Protext
Arnor – 7.4%

4. Mini Office
Database – 7.2%

5. Mini Office 2
Database – 6.6%

6. Easi-Amsword
Amsoft – 5.8%

7. Tasword
Tasman – 3.2%

8. The Quill
Gilsoft – 3.1%

9. Discovery
Siren Software – 2.8%

10. Odd Job
Pride Utilities – 2.5%

The Voting System

For anyone new to our state-of-the-art voting forms and system or anyone STILL having trouble here's another run down on what to so and how to do it.

You have at your disposal a TOTAL of 10 votes for each chart. These can be split up any way you like on up to five titles, but the number of votes you give to the different titles must add up to 10.

For example, on the games chart you could give all 10 votes to a single game. Or you could 5 votes to one game, 2 to another, and 1 each to three others. You just have to allocate your 10 votes to reflect your preferences as accurately as possible. What you CAN'T do is give five different games 7 or 8 votes each. That's greedy.

One further thing you certainly can't do is send in photocopies of the form. There have been attempts at jiggery-pokery in the past, so we want to avoid any possibility of it happening again.

GAMES TOP 20

1. Elite
Firebird – 9.7%

2. Sorcery Plus
Virgin/Amsoft – 7.7%

2. TLL
Vortex – 7.7%

4. Yie Ar Kung Fu
Imagine – 7.5%

5. Who Dares Wins II
Alligata – 5.1%

6. Marsport
Gargoyle – 4.6%

7. Starion
Melbourne House – 4.2%

8. Sweevo's World
Gargoyle – 3.5%

9. Highway Encounter
Vortex – 3.5%

10. Barry McGuigan's Boxing
Activision – 3.1%

11. Soul of a Robot
Mastertronic – 3.1%

12. Raid
US Gold – 2.7%

13. Cauldron
Palace – 2.7%

14. Alien 8
Ultimate – 2.4%

15. Sorcery
Virgin – 1.8%

16. Sabre Wulf
Ultimate – 1.8%

17. DT's Decathlon
Ocean — 1.8%

18. Spellbound
Mastertronic – 1.7%

19. 3D Grand Prix
Amsoft – 1.5%

20. Strangeloop
Virgin – 1.3%

THE ALL-IN-ONE ACTION FORM

IMPORTANT
Don't forget to fill in this bit!

Name ____________________

Age ____________________

Address ____________________

____

Telephone number ____________________

Fill in as much of the form as you wish (front and back). Then cut out the ENTIRE PAGE (even if you've only filled in parts of it) and post it to:
AA Forms, 18 Pinewood Drive
Somerton, Somerset, TA11 6JP

Mail Order Section

I would like the following titles:

Game	Software house	Retail price
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Total cost pre-discount,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,

Please circle ONE of the following A-H if it applies:

A: The total cost is under £5.

B: The total cost is between £5 and £10, and I enclose a 50p discount voucher.

C: The total cost is between £10 and £15, and I enclose a £1 discount voucher.

D: The total cost is between £15 and £20. I enclose a £1 discount voucher and claim ONE free game.

E: The total cost is between £20 and £30. I enclose a £2 discount voucher and claim ONE free game.

F: The total cost is between £30 and £50. I enclose a £2 discount voucher and claim TWO free games.

G: The total cost is over £50. I enclose a £5 discount voucher and claim TWO free games.

H: I enclose 1/2/3/4 vouchers from earlier issues of AA, entitling me to a 5%/10%/15%/20% discount.

After allowing for discount the total amount payable is,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,

I enclose a cheque/postal order for this amount made out to Future Publishing.

If you are claiming a free game or games please CIRCLE your first choice(s) and place a TICK by any of the other titles you will accept if your first choice(s) are out of stock:
American Football / Amsgolf / Chuckie Egg / Classic Adventure / Code Name Matt / Electro Freddy / Hunter Killer / Hunchback / Jet Boot Jack / Laser Warp / MasterChess / Manic Miner / Message from Andromeda / Roland Goes Digging / Space Hawks / Splat! / Super Pipeline II

Game chart voting form

I would like to vote for the following game(s):

GAME	SOFTWARE HOUSE	NO. OF VOTES
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Total number of votes = 10

Serious software voting form

I would like to vote for the following piece(s) of 'serious software':

PROGRAM	SOFTWARE HOUSE	NO. OF VOTES
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Total number of votes = 10

THE ALL-IN-ONE ACTION FORM

Special Offer Section

Fill in name and address overleaf!

I would like to take advantage of the following special offer(s) and have placed a tick in the relevant box(es).

1. ELITE
☐ cass £11.95 ☐ disk £16.95

2. THE MUSIC SYSTEM
☐ cass £12.95 ☐ disk £16.95

3. MINI OFFICE 2
☐ cass £11.95 ☐ disk £16.95

4. PACE MODEM PACKAGE
☐ Complete £139.95

5. INFOCOM ADVENTURES
My machine is (please circle): CPC 464/664/6128 / PCW 8256
☐ Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy £19.95
☐ Zork 1 £16.95 ☐ Seastalker £16.95
☐ Deadline £16.95 ☐ Planetfall £16.95

6. MOON CRESTA + T-SHIRT £8.50
T-shirt size ☐ small ☐ medium ☐ large ☐ extra-large

7. BIG LEAGUE SOCCER
☐ cass £4.95

8. WALLY GAMES (Tick TWO for £7.95)
☐ Pyjamarama ☐ Everyone's a Wally ☐ Herbert's Dummy Run

9. ALEX HIGGINS WORLD POOL/SNOOKER
☐ cass(2) £7.90

I enclose a cheque/postal order for the total amount payable made out to Future Publishing. (Please note, you are not entitled to claim further discounts or free gifts on this amount. They apply only to the Mail Order section.)

Name ....

Address ....

....

(For administrative reasons you should fill in the above details here as well as on the reverse of the form).

High-score entry

I would like to register my high-scores in the following Amstrad games:

	GAME	SCORE	TIME TAKEN	LEVEL
1.				
2.				
3.				

I promise these are genuine scores achieved without using cheat methods.
Signed

High-score challenge

I hereby challenge the following high scores printed in Amstrad Action:

	GAME	SCORE
1.		
2.		

I think the score(s) impossible because:

PSSSSSST! A KN

Sens

Save £3!
OPTION 1
Any of these titles for £6.95



GET DEXTER

Our Mastergame review in this issue plus the screen demonstrated on our tape should be enough to convince you this program from France has simply astonishing qualities in graphics, gameplay and originality. Remember there are 49 other screens to work your way through. Alors, c'est magnifique!



SWORDS AND SORCERY

The award-winning, massively sophisticated Dungeons and Dragons game is yours for the asking. A huge game offering months of challenge as you develop a character and gradually progress through the hazard-filled dungeon If you've been wowed by the demo version, the thing itself could blow your mind.



DOOMSDAY BLUES

Our demo program will have convinced you that this French title has a superbly original atmosphere all its own. But are you up to taking on the challenge the full game poses? Dare you discover the enemy that lies on the other side of that locked door?

SUBSCRIBE!

And get superb FREE software

Amstrad Action's subscription offers are famed throughout the land for their unmatchable generosity. For £16.50 (an amount which includes post, packing, everything) you not only guarantee yourself a 12-month supply of what is, let's be honest, your favourite magazine, you also get a choice of the cream of software available on the Amstrad.

CASSETTE owners can have ANY TWO of the following games all of which normally sell for between £7.95 and £9.95.

Highway Encounter (Vortex) – an AA Mastergame, great graphics, superb gameplay.
Yie Ar Kung Fu (Imagine) – another Mastergame, the combat game to end them all.
Alien 8 (Ultimate) – one of the all time Amstrad classics.
Marsport (Gargoyle) – massive arcade-adventure, AA Mastergame, great animation.
Impossible Mission (US Gold) – top-selling underground platform adventure.

DISK owners can have any ONE of the following Amsoft disk games, all of which normally sell for £13.95.
Raid – the classy, controversial shoot-em-up.
Sorcery + – the stunning expanded version that's too big to fit on cassette!
3D Grand Prix – the best motor-racing simulation on the Amstrad.
Strangeloop + – another blockbusting arcade-adventure from the Sorcery programming team.
Cyrus 2 Chess – powerful chess program, stunning 3D display.

To order simply complete the form below and send it off, together with payment to: **Subscription Offer, Amstrad Action, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 5AH.** Please note that if your order arrives less than a week before the on-sale date of our next issue, your subscription won't start until the *following* issue.

OVERSEAS READERS: Please note we charge the same subscription rate for the REPUBLIC OF IRELAND provided that payment is made in Sterling. If you wish to pay in Irish punts the rate is IR24.00. This allows for a £3 fee the bank charges us to pay in Irish cheques.
For readers elsewhere in Europe the rate is £32.50 to allow for extra postage costs.

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER FORM

Name..

Address...

....

I would like to take out a 12-month subscription to Amstrad Action and enclose a cheque or postal order for £16.50 made out to Future Publishing. I have circled my choice of free software below from EITHER the cassette selection OR the disk selection.

CASSETTES: (Please circle TWO):
Highway Encounter / Yie Ar Kung Fu / Marsport / Alien 8 / Everyone's a Wally / Impossible Mission

DISKS (Please circle ONE):
Sorcery + / Raid / 3D Grand Prix / Cyrus 2 Chess / Strangeloop +

OCKOUT OFFER

ational savings on cover cassette titles!

Save £7! **OPTION 2** Any TWO titles for £12.90

Save £12! **OPTION 3** Any THREE titles for £17.85

Save £18! **OPTION 4** Any FOUR titles for £21.80

Save £25! **OPTION 5** All FIVE titles for £24.75

You've seen the ads, you've read the reviews, you've sampled the action. Now for the real thing.

We're offering at huge savings all the superb PSS titles demonstrated on our cover cassette plus the chilling war game Theatre Europe. They normally cost £9.95 each, but you can have any one at a £3 discount. Buy two and you get £7 off. Three means a £12 saving. Get four and you save £18. Or you could go the whole hog and bag all five programs for no less than £25 off than shop prices. That's under half price!

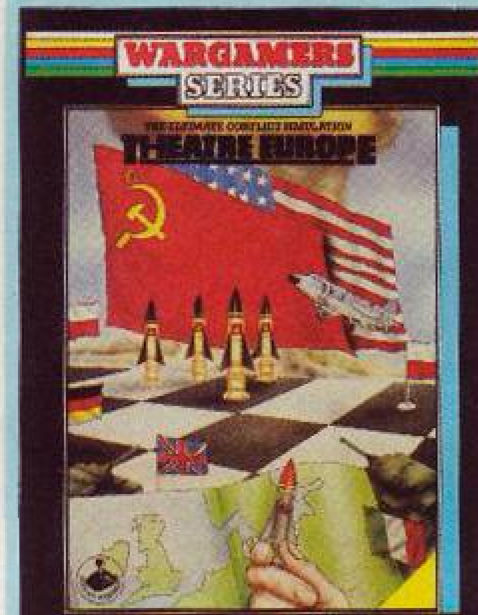
You won't find any better way of getting hold of programs from a software house who now seem destined to make a massive impact on the Amstrad market.

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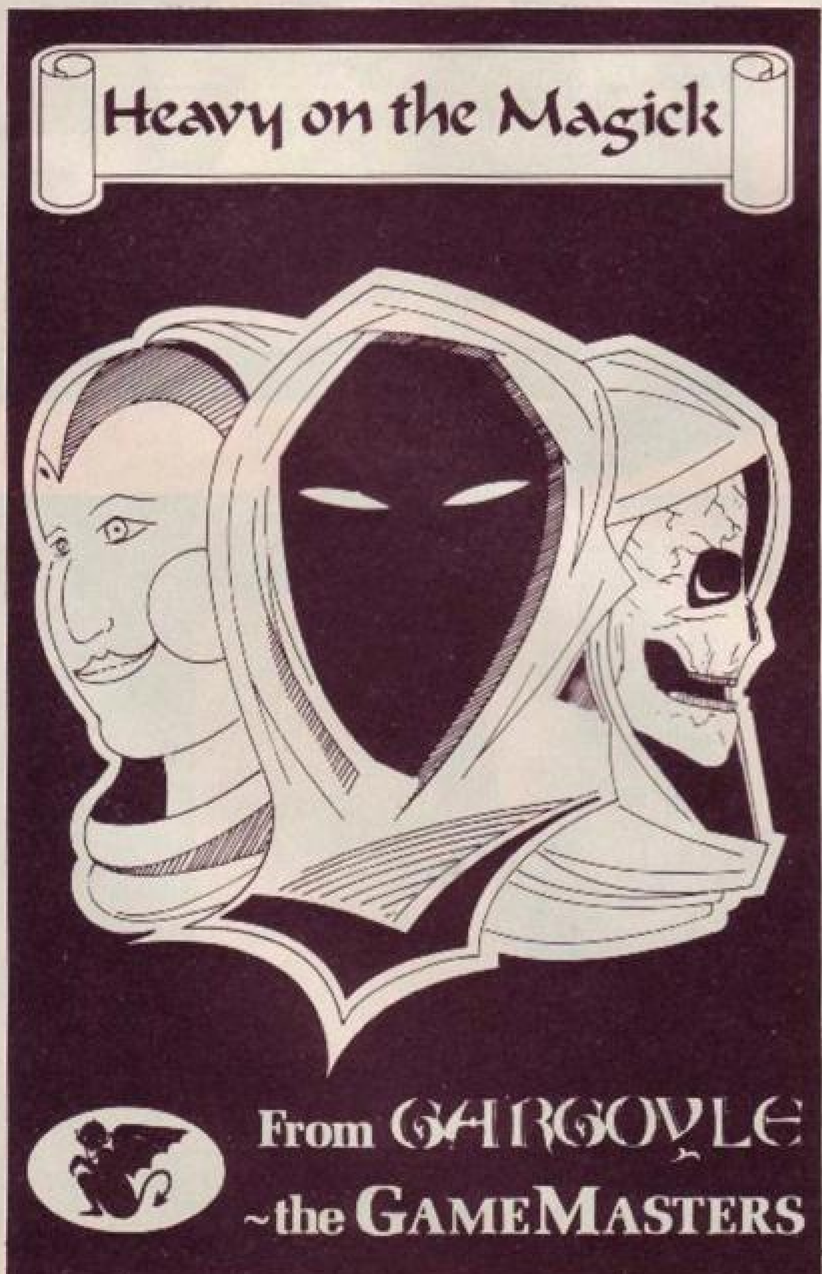
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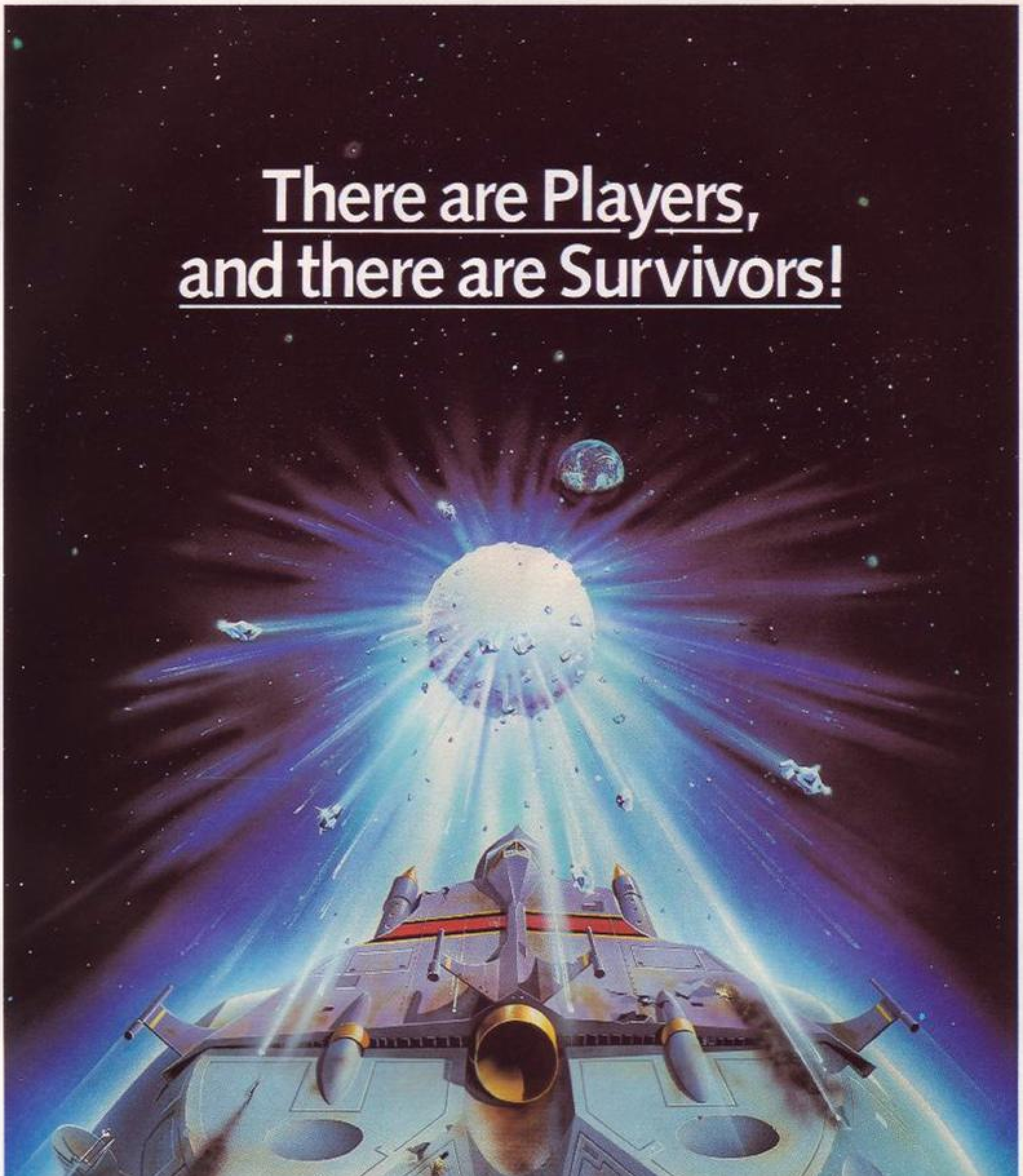
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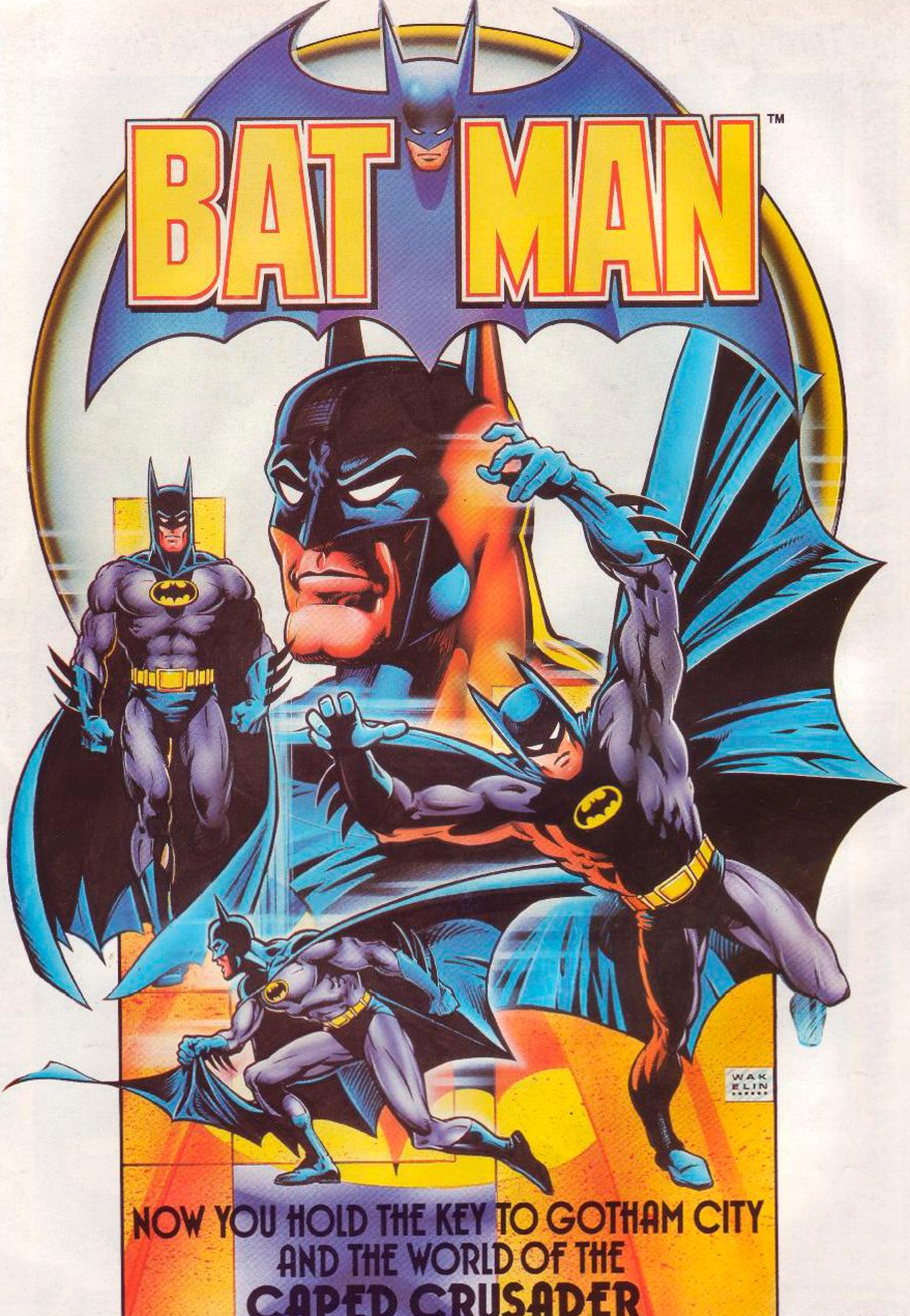
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